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THE INDEPENDENT

Saturday 21 February 1998 70p No 3,540

Thousands to sue over slimming pills

By Jeremy Lawrence Health Editor

Tens of thousands of overweight Americans are preparing to sue the manufacturers of two of the most popular slimming pills, what lawyers are predicting could be the largest compensation case since asbestos. The worldwide withdrawal of the drugs fenfluramine and dexfenfluramine last summer after they were linked with heart problems has triggered a feeding frenzy among legal firms who have been lurking with the prospect of multi-million dollar suits.

More than 60,000 prescriptions for fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine were is-

sued in 1996 in the UK but there have been no reports of patients suffering the heart problem side-effects and no arrangements have been made by the Department of Health for tracing patients who may have taken the drugs. As yet, there are no reports of imminent British legal actions.

A spokeswoman for Alexander Harris, the Manchester solicitors who specialise in medical litigation, said: "We have had a couple of inquiries but interest is only just beginning. It usually follows what happens in the US."

An estimated four to six million patients in the US have taken the pills and studies have suggested more than a million could

be affected. Cases have been filed in every US state and a steering group of lawyers are meeting early next month to co-ordinate them in a mass action to be heard before a judge in Philadelphia.

Larry Burman, a Philadelphia lawyer and member of the steering group, said: "There are hundreds of cases filed in the federal courts and hundreds and hundreds of the state court system. Each could be one person or 20. A lot of people are saying this could be one of the biggest mass tort cases [class actions] ever to hit the court system."

Paul Rheingold, a New York lawyer said: "We have 3,000 cases we are looking into and we are filing five or six a day. We don't

know how many will translate into law suits but we have 100 so far. I would guess the total for the US will involve 100,000 individuals, one of the biggest actions ever."

Diet pills became a craze in America four years ago. The most popular prescription was for "fen-phen", the appetite suppressant fenfluramine which was combined with the stimulant drug phentermine to increase its effectiveness. The US Food and Drugs Administration asked the manufacturers of fenfluramine to withdraw the product after studies showed 30 per cent of patients taking the combination had abnormal echocardiograms, indicating heart defects.

The fen-phen combination never

caught on in the UK prior to the withdrawal of fenfluramine.

Some patients have been found to have damaged heart valves and pulmonary hypertension – increased resistance to the flow of blood in the lungs. The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported last August the case of a 29-year-old woman who died after taking the combination for only 23 days. She was five-feet five-inches tall and weighed 13-and-a-half stone.

Mr Rheingold said: "If you are talking pulmonary hypertension or valve replacement, those are million dollar cases. Others could have a claim for psychological damage. But many may have been unaware

anything was wrong until they had an echocardiogram."

Fenfluramine, which is thought to be the cause of the problems, was introduced in the Sixties and has been taken by millions of people. Dexfenfluramine, which is half the molecule of fenfluramine, has also been withdrawn. It was developed to retain the appetite suppressant properties but with fewer side effects of dry mouth, dizziness and digestive problems. Phentermine remains on the market.

Experts are puzzled why it has taken so long for the danger to emerge. One possibility is that it may only apply to the combination treatment.

Sinn Fein ban fails to please either side

By David McKittrick
London Correspondent

SINN FEIN was harred yesterday from the Irish multiparty talks for the next two weeks. The long-awaited move drew protests from both Unionists and republicans – Unionists because they wanted permanent exclusion, and republicans because they wanted no expulsion at all.

The British and Irish governments, in excluding Sinn Fein until 9 March, seemed at the same time concerned to act as leniently as possible. It has been clear for some time that Sinn Fein would be penalised following two recent IRA killings, but London and Dublin have given the impression that the measure would be taken with reluctance.

Both governments had concluded that Sinn Fein had to go, but both want to have them back in to participate in negotiations as the talks approach their May deadline. The Irish foreign minister, David Andrews, paid tribute to Sinn Fein's "valuable contribution" to the talks.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, said contact with Sinn Fein would be maintained during its absence. She added: "There is little time left now until May. Both governments are determined to work with the parties in the coming six weeks. We want as many parties as possible, including Sinn Fein, to have their opportunity to contribute."

The decision was condemned by Sinn Fein's president, Gerry Adams, who said he was seeking urgent meetings with Tony Blair and the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. Sinn Fein has abandoned its attempt in the Dublin High Court to obtain a legal re-

straint on the governments. Describing the current situation as a crisis and "a huge setback" for the peace process, Mr Adams declared: "The decision is disgraceful. The process by which it was reached lacks any notion of natural justice. Sinn Fein is out, but Sinn Fein is not down."

He said there was palpable anger in nationalist areas, and added: "I appeal to everyone to channel their anger and frustration at today's decision into calm and disciplined protest."

There have already been signs of an increased security force presence around some nationalist areas in anticipation of possible protests and street disturbances.

By contrast, the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, said the decision marked a new low in the process. He added: "The credibility of the Government is being squandered and if it has any honour left it must feel very soiled to do."

Just as Sinn Fein are being sent off the field, the Ulster Democratic party is to be allowed back on from next Monday, following a period of suspension imposed after three killings by its paramilitary associates, the Ulster Defence Association.

The UDP negotiator David Adams said: "We would be seriously concerned at the fact that the governments have seen fit not only to specify a date for Sinn Fein, which they failed to do for us, but also that that date means that in fact Sinn Fein's time out of the process is far less than ours."

"This would seem to indicate that the two governments seem to value some lives more than others, and is a clear indication of double standards for republicans and loyalists."

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Dressing up in Venice: Carnival time fills Venice with glorious costumes; this year's theme is Casanova, who died 200 years ago. Looking for the party, page 15. Photograph: Brian Harris

'My sacred duty': Annan flies into Baghdad in final bid to head off war

By Andrew Marshall

KOFI ANNAN flew into Baghdad yesterday in a last-ditch effort to head off a war with Iraq. The UN Secretary-General said he had a "sacred duty" to try to defuse Iraq's stand-off with the United Nations.

His task is far from simple:

he must persuade Iraq to give UN weapons inspectors enough freedom to satisfy the US and the UN, something the UN has failed to do so far. The US and Britain will be on their guard for any effort to prolong the diplomatic proceedings merely in order to head off air strikes.

Mr Annan was met at Baghdad's Saddam International Airport by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and Foreign

Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sabah. "I hope I will leave Baghdad with a package that will be acceptable to all... I'm reasonably optimistic that we will find a peaceful solution," Annan told reporters. Aziz added: "Iraq wants a balanced and fair solution – that preserves the sovereignty, dignity and national security of Iraq as well as the implementation of UN resolutions."

Mr Annan will begin talks with Mr Aziz this morning; an appointment with Saddam Hussein will be arranged if this goes well. Mr Annan has said he expects to spend no more than two days in Baghdad before returning to New York.

President Bill Clinton put the onus for an end to the dispute firmly on Saddam yester-

day in a televised message to Arab nations. He said Washington had "no quarrel with the Iraqi people, who are heirs to a proud civilisation and who have suffered for so many years under Saddam's rule."

He added: "If force proves necessary to resolve this crisis, we will do everything we can to prevent innocent people from getting hurt. But make no mistake about it, Saddam must bear full responsibility for every casualty that results."

As Mr Annan flew in, the United Nations approved a new plan that would allow Iraq to double the amount of oil it can sell on world markets to buy food and medicine. The Security Council agreed to increase from \$2.1bn to \$5.2bn the amount of oil Iraq can sell every

six months, though Iraq says it cannot produce this amount.

The timing of the vote was clearly meant as a boost to the Secretary-General's prospects when he meets Saddam Hussein.

"This is an excellent outcome today," Sir John Weston, Britain's UN representative said. "It's a very good decision to be announcing at [this point]."

But the background to the visit is not encouraging. The US and Britain have assembled a massive fleet in the Gulf, and anger at their presence is growing. Protests erupted yesterday in Amman in Jordan, where at least one protester was killed and Turkish police clashed with hundreds of Islamists demonstrating after Friday prayers in central Istanbul.

Top jockey admitted throwing race, says television commentator

By Ian Burrell

Champion jockey Kieran Fallon was accused yesterday in the High Court of admitting throwing a race. It was alleged that Mr Fallon had told a television racing presenter that he had "puffed" the horse on instructions from its trainer. The claim was made during Mr Fallon's legal case against the *Sporting Life* racing paper.

Channel 4's Derek Thompson said, under subpoena, to the *Sporting Life*, that Mr Fallon had confessed to not riding "Top

Cees to win in the Swaffham handicap, when the two had discussed the race at The Old Plough pub near Newmarket.

He told Mr Justice Morland and the jury: "I don't want to repeat this, which is why I've tried to stop it coming to open court because it was said to me in confidence. I was asking: 'What happened with Top Cees this afternoon as I thought he would win and Kieran's words were 'Yes, I thought the horse would win as well but when I got into the paddock Jack told me to stop it'."

Cross-examined by Richard Hartley QC, for the *Sporting*

Life, Mr Fallon denied that his orders that day had been not to win. Mr Hartley said: "But if the governor tells you not to win, I suggest that you, as the jockey on that occasion, would follow orders." Mr Fallon countered: "You think I would risk my licence in order to stop a horse?"

The Ramsdens and Mr Fallon are suing over a "savage verbal onslaught", in an unsigned editorial in May 1995, the day after Top Cees won the Chester Cup. It said they conspired to deceive the public by deliberately not trying to win the

race, Mr Fallon denied that his orders that day had been not to win. Mr Hartley said: "But if the governor tells you not to win, I suggest that you, as the jockey on that occasion, would follow orders." Mr Fallon countered: "You think I would risk my licence in order to stop a horse?"

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Further reports, Sport



Kieran Fallon: told court that TV man was lying

INSIDE GUIDE

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Men in sex parties case escape jail sentences

By Kathy Marks

SEVEN men who became the focus of an international campaign after they were prosecuted for taking part in private sex parties escaped prison sentences yesterday at Bolton Crown Court.

Judge Michael Lever, QC, had warned that he might jail at least some of the so-called

Bolton Seven, who were found guilty of buggery and gross indecency at a trial last month.

But after more than three hours of defence submissions in mitigation, the judge handed out suspended sentences to two of the men, and probation and community service orders to the rest.

The defendants, who had received letters of support from two bishops and from human rights groups around the world,

were prosecuted after police seized video tapes on which they had recorded the parties for their own amusement.

Under the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, sex between men is illegal if more than two people are present. The men faced prison sentences of up to five years, and Amnesty International planned to adopt them as prisoners of conscience if they were jailed.

Gay campaigners have con-

demned the law as discriminatory, in that it penalises private sexual behaviour between consenting adults. All the Bolton men were over the age of consent, except one who was just under 18, and all were willing participants.

Outside court yesterday, the men issued a statement in which they condemned the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service to pursue the case.

"Regardless of the sentence, the trial has had a ruinous effect on our lives," they said, adding that the "cruel retribution" of an obscure section of the Act showed "callous insensitivity".

"One of the positive consequences of this bitter experience is that a new sense of outrage and urgency has been injected into the law reform movement, and the demand for a comprehensive review of our sex laws

may well now become irresistible," the men said.

Before passing sentence, the judge referred to numerous letters that he had received asking him to show clemency. He said he accepted that Terry Connell, 55, the oldest defendant, was "a perfectly respectable and decent man" who had "led an exemplary life".

Ben Emmerson, a defence barrister, argued in mitigation

that the prosecutions were a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and that, although the Convention had not yet been incorporated into English law, the judge was obliged to take account of it.

Mr Emmerson also said publicly about the trial had led to several of the men being assaulted and to firebomb attacks on their homes.

Sources close to the case say

that police originally raided the house of one defendant, Norman Williams, in the mistaken belief that he was part of a paedophile ring.

It has emerged that Barbara Mills, the Director of Public Prosecutions endorsed the decision to prosecute the men. In a letter to Brian Iddon, MP for Bolton South-East, Dame Barbara said the prosecution was in the public interest.

Goodbye to the Metro, the car we never quite fell in love with

By Ross Prince

It was supposed to be the Mini for the 1980s, a nippy little run around that would rescue the British motoring industry from the misfortune of the Japanese.

Eighteen years on, the last Metro trundled off the production line yesterday, outclassed and outsold by snappier models with snappier names: Polo, Clio and Micra.

At its death the Metro wasn't even British any more, having come under the ownership of the Bavarian über-firm BMW when Rover was sold to the Germans. It will be replaced by a new Mini, to be built jointly by Rover and BMW.

The Metro started life as in October 1980 as the Austin Mini Metro. It was initially the saviour of British Leyland, which before the car's introduction hadn't manufactured a big seller for years. But had a chequered career, suffering from a lack of funding. After each attempt at revamp and relaunch it would rocket to occupy top spot in its class, the most super of the super minis, but plummet swiftly as it failed to keep up with the competition.

The high point of the Metro's journey came early on when its picture went around the world, carrying then Lady Diana Spencer away from the cameras during her engagement to Prince Charles.

Falling sales and snubs from other drivers dented the little car's image, but by far its lowest moment was unconnected to manufacturing problems.

The Metro attracted infamy and humiliation for its owners when, in 1994, it was revealed as the sexual partner



End of an era: The final Metro is signed off by all the workers who helped make it in the company's Longbridge factory

of choice for a disturbed 20-year-old man, who was treated for his fetish at the Institute of Psychiatry in London. The Metro's biggest fan said he found it particularly arousing when the car's exhaust pipe belched fumes.

Despite this the car enjoyed periods of more conventional popularity, its sales pushing past the two million mark.

It was even voted Best Small Car

in the World by *Autocar* and *Motor* after its 1990 relaunch. The trouble was that even the redesigned car began to look outdated as it failed to keep up with its competitors.

Often derided for its cramped interior, and, some said, unattractive look, the original Metro had an engine dating back to the Morris Minor technology of the 1950s. Despite being branded "the car to beat the world,"

drivers complained it whined at speeds over 45 miles per hour.

Still, that didn't stop its manufacturers from trying to add some sales with a little badge engineering – the hatchback was renamed the Rover Metro in 1990 and eventually became the Rover 100 in 1994.

The last Rover 100, in a striking silver finish, was waved off from Rover's Longbridge plant in Birmingham last

week. It was signed by all of the 1,200 people who worked on it and handed over to the Heritage Centre Motor Museum in Gaydon, Warwickshire.

Although production has stopped, a last batch of cars, no doubt future classics, are still available. They come in three and five door models, 1.1 or 1.4 litre K series engines and five different trim levels. Prices range from £6,500 to £10,000. A bargain.

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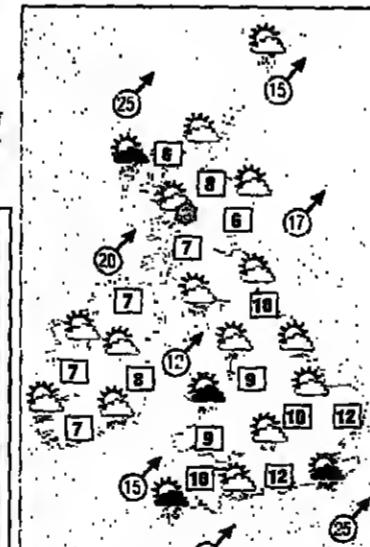
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Recycled paper made up 41.4% of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1997.

WEATHER

The British Isles, noon today



most recent available figure (noon local time). c. cloudy; Usr: 10-15; h: heavy rain; sn: snow; s: sunny; th: thunder

Aberdeen	6.18	59	Glasgow	11.52	Inverness	6.14	57	Orkney	6.11	52	
Angus	6.18	59	Cardiff	6.12	54	Ipswich	6.9	48	Plymouth	6.11	52
Ayr	6.11	52	Carlisle	6.11	52	Isle of Man	6.12	54	Scarborough	6.9	49
Belfast	6.11	52	Cork	6.11	52	Jersey	6.9	48	Sheffield	6.11	52
Birmingham	6.12	54	Dover	6.13	55	Liverpool	6.12	55	Hong Kong	6.26	74
Blackpool	6.11	52	Dublin	6.13	55	London	6.12	54	Istanbul	6.1	45
Bournemouth	6.11	58	Edinburgh	6.13	55	Manchester	6.11	52	Jerusalem	6.15	59
Brighton	6.18	58	Exeter	6.13	55	Newcastle	6.11	52	Kyoto	6.12	51
Bristol	6.18	58	Glasgow	6.11	52	Nottingham	6.12	54	Madrid	6.18	51
Bristol	6.18	58	Gwynedd	6.18	58	Portsmouth	6.13	55	Milan	6.23	79
Carmarthen	6.12	54	Wales	6.11	52	Southampton	6.12	54	Montreal	6.0	22

General summary and outlook:

Overnight rain will soon clear eastern parts, then it will be a fresher day than of late everywhere with a mix of sunshine and showers. Only a few locations in eastern Scotland and north-east England are likely to escape dry, and it is here that the best of the days sunshine can be expected. The showers will be frequent in the west throughout the day, with sleet in the north and snow on the peaks. Some of the afternoon showers will be rather sharp and slow to clear. Sunday will be mainly dry with sunny breaks although a few showers will occur in the west. It will turn milder by Monday with rain and strong winds in the north, but elsewhere will be mainly dry. The mild spell of weather will continue through Tuesday and Wednesday, with some further rain in the far north and a little drizzle possible in the west. However, the east and south will be mainly dry with sunny breaks.

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Is Branson's honeymoon finally over?

Tycoon shrugs off the flak as he takes a battering from his critics. Michael Harrison reports

HAS the halo finally begun to slip? This weekend the man who was once ranked second only to Mother Teresa as a role model for the young is looking distinctly less saintly. The man is, of course, Richard Branson, boss of the Virgin empire, and this has not been one of his better weeks.

It began with a demolition job by the BBC Panorama programme on the performance of its West Coast train franchise. It ended with a double-barrelled assault from *The Spectator* and *The Economist*, both of which chose to make Mr Branson the subject of less-than-flattering copy stories.

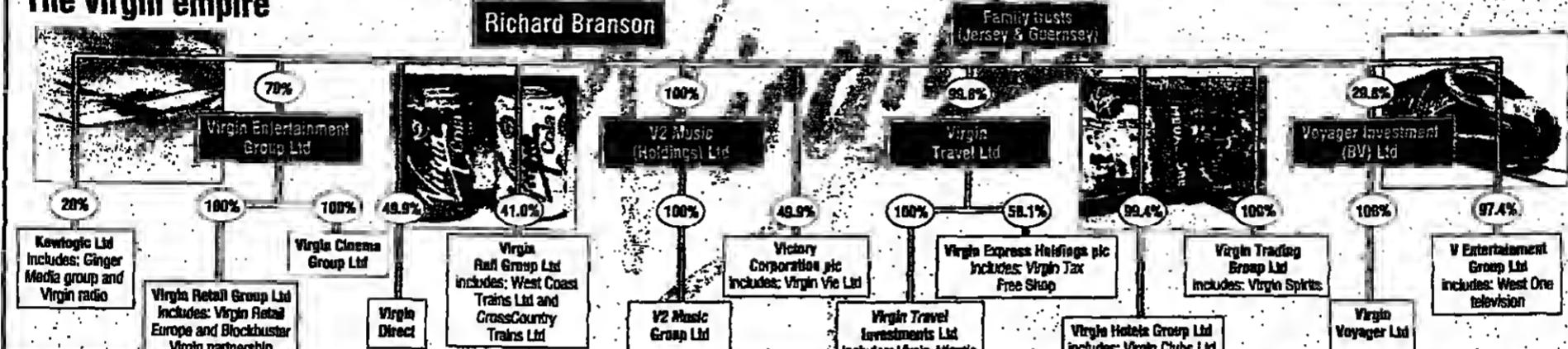
The Spectator's was a piece of ill-tempered polemic charting how Mr Branson has risen to the top on a tide of litigation, news management and self-promotion. *The Economist* contained a more sober but telling assessment of the financial vulnerability of the Virgin companies and the way in which their true ownership is disguised by a web of offshore trusts.

Little of the information presented was that groundbreaking: Virgin has encountered such flak before and sailed through unscathed to stamp the brand on everything from air travel, bridal wear and a radio station to cola, vodka, personal pensions and cinemas.

But the combination of the twin attacks was enough to wipe the smile off that famously bearded face for once. Speaking yesterday from his chalet in the Swiss ski resort of Zermatt, Mr Branson was not amused by the bad publicity, but accepted it might be partly his own fault. "We have been away for the week so we haven't been able to fight fire properly," he reflected. "It could all just be a coincidence of course, but out of



The virgin empire



the things that came out of the court case was just how much money PR companies are being paid to keep an eye on Virgin. We have a lot of competitors and a lot of enemies out there."

The court case Mr Branson is referring to is his spectacular libel victory over Guy Snowdon of the Camelot member GTech – a victory that has done no harm to Virgin's lingering ambitions to take over the National Lottery.

But the libel win has since been overshadowed by a string of setbacks. Virgin has bought out its partner in the Virgin Colombie, Con of Canada, after disappointing sales and the failure of the brand to grab more than a negligible market share. Virgin Vodka has also performed miserably and is now on sale only in a handful of duty-free shops and on Virgin Atlantic flights. Theo came the

collapse of the consortium selected to build the £5bn Channel Tunnel rail link, London & Continental Railways, in which Virgin has a 17 per cent stake. To critics of the Virgin empire, this run of bad luck has crystallised everything that is wrong with the Branson formula. First, that the brand, Virgin's most important and, arguably, its only real asset, will be devoured through association

with failure. Second, that the Virgin strategy of expanding through joint ventures, while a cute way of getting others to underwrite the investment needed for new businesses, also denies Virgin real management control. And third, that Mr Branson is now taking on businesses that have an insatiable appetite for cash, like railways. According to *The Economist's* analysis of the accounts

of Mr Branson's 40 most important companies, the Virgin empire is barely profitable. It calculates that the Virgin Travel group, making profits of £67.5m on turnover of £886m, mainly due to the contribution of the airline. But it says that six other main Virgin Group companies lost £27.8m on sales of £384m while a further eight companies, in which Virgin has less than a 50 per cent stake, in-

cluding its two rail franchises, lost £37.5m, of which Virgin's share is £15.4m.

That said, it is all but impossible to grasp the full financial picture at Virgin because its myriad businesses are not held together in a consolidated group

but are owned through a Byzantine structure of offshore trusts in the Channel Isles and British Virgin Islands.

Mr Branson did briefly ex-

periment with a public listing, turning his empire, minus the airline, into a quoted company in 1986. But he took the business private again two years later, tiring in part at the disclosure requirements that come with a public quote.

Mr Branson describes *The Economist's* article as "not unfair" but he insists it paints an unduly gloomy picture. "We are in the strongest position we have ever been in. Our businesses are generating £150m of cash a year and almost every new venture we are involved in has strong outside partners to finance it."

The biggest of these is Virgin Trains, the holding company for the West Coast and Cross Country franchises. And if that business goes bad it could bring down the whole pack of cards.

Over the 15-year life of the franchise, Virgin has to make royalty payments to the government of £1.24bn at the same time as funding a £1bn fleet of high-speed tilting trains. It also has to double passenger numbers to make consistent profits.

Funding is intended to come from a market flotation of Virgin Trains this summer. But passenger complaints are running at higher levels some months than in the days of BR and some of the rolling stock is so decrepit that Virgin has not repainted it in its familiar red and white livery. Worse, the disruption caused by Railtrack's £21bn modernisation of the line is likely to mean a further deterioration in the service until early next century.

Mr Branson insists the flotation remains on course and blames the complaints on the heightened public expectations engendered when Virgin took over. But sceptics wonder how the business can possibly be floated against such a backdrop.

The Virgin chairman has been in a similar hole before. In 1992 he raised £510m from the sale of the Virgin music publishing business to EMI in order to shore up the other parts of his empire.

The question now is whether he will have to part company with Virgin Atlantic – valued at between £500m and £800m – to finance his railway ambitions.

Hutchence died 'bankrupt'

By Ian Burwell



Hutchence: bankrupt when he died?

PAULA YATES could get nothing from the estate of Michael Hutchence because he disguised the ownership of his £20m fortune to avoid paying tax and was technically bankrupt when he died, it was alleged yesterday.

An investigation by the Australian newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, claimed that the INXS rock star used an elaborate network of trust companies to hide the ownership of his assets. As a result, his lover Ms Yates and the couple's daughter Tiger Lily could end up without a penny.

Documents were distributed to beneficiaries of the estate this week by lawyers in Hong Kong. They showed that apart from minor property investments and insurance policies, the singer – who committed suicide in a Sydney hotel room in November – owned very little.

Missing from the estate, said the newspaper, are his investment properties on Australia's Gold Coast, his French villa and

(nearly £500,000) against known liabilities totalling just under a quarter of that amount.

But the singer also gave a personal guarantee to cover the costs of Paula Yates's legal battle with her former husband Bob Geldof, which could total millions.

The alarm was first raised over the estate when Hutchence's mother Patricia Glassop and his sister Tina were told the singer did not actually own a luxury waterfront house at the resort of Surfer's Paradise, which he had told them was his.

That and two other Australian properties are held by a complex network of trusts, as is his villa in the South of France.

Barrister Colin Thomas Diamond, who legally controls Hutchence's assets, is said by the newspaper to have established an intricate web of trusts and holding companies throughout the world.

The documents distributed by lawyers this week also showed that at his London home he owned only personal effects.

Paula Yates's solicitor, Anthony Burton, said yesterday that he was unaware of the report. "I have absolutely no comment to make about Michael's estate," he said.

Orchestras are told to double Dutch

By Abi Daravallia
in Amsterdam

THREE FAMOUS DUTCH COMPOSERS YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF

Theo Louwendie; Peter Schat; Louis Andriessen

guilders (£45m) annually.

Eddy Koning, the Concertgebouw Orchestra's lawyer, describes the quota system as "ridiculous" referring in particular to its definition of Dutch composers which she claims can be stretched to include such "Dutch" masters as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler.

"The ministry says composers can be considered Dutch if they are Dutch nationals, live in the Netherlands or have made a long-term and significant contribution to Dutch music. There is a case to be made that these famous names have fulfilled the latter condition," said Ms Koning.

his work because it was just five minutes long."

But the Dutch Composers Society, which has around 200 members, backs the government's policy. Board member Andre Douw who is also coordinator of the composition department at Amsterdam's prestigious Sweelinck Conservatory, insisted the measure was necessary. "It's a drastic solution but something has to be done because this problem has been playing for a long time and the orchestras refused to take action voluntarily."

Some Dutch composers like Theo Louwendie, Louis Andriessen and Peter Schat are well-known contemporary classical composers but newcomers like Theo Verhey need the opportunity to have their work heard. Some composers are insulted that such a policy is necessary and I can understand that but hopefully it will be an interim solution."

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Conspiracies abound as Cole quits 'toughest job in PR'

Was he pushed, or did he fall? Steve Boggan examines the career of the man who fronted for Mohamed Al Fayed

Michael Cole, the buxom-haired front-man for Harrods owner Mohamed Al Fayed, stepped down yesterday, sparking the kind of conspiracy theories he had fostered under his master since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Fayed. "Did he fall or was he pushed?" was the question being bounced around media circles after the world's most famous department store unexpectedly announced his retirement at the age of 55.

Harrods and Mr Cole, a former BBC Royal Correspondent, issued a joint statement which said the departure was amicable and mutual. But the subsequent unavailability of Mr Cole fanned the flames of speculation. Not only had the announcement been timed to coincide with a Cole family holiday at a secret location, but his home and mobile telephone numbers also went dead. It was an abrupt end to a moribund year for Mr Cole, who joined Harrods as director of public affairs in 1988 after 27 years as a journalist.

He had borne a huge responsibility in the weeks after the deaths of Diana and Dodi. Some would argue the role was made more difficult because it involved repeating Mr Fayed's insistence that Earl Paul, driver of the car in which the princess and Mr Fayed's son died, had not been drinking excessively. A post-mortem examination showed he was over the limit and had been taking prescription drugs.

More recently, Mr Fayed's claims that the couple were

murdered and that he was told of Diana's "last words" - words which doctors said were never uttered - may have sat awkwardly with Mr Cole's instincts as a former journalist.

During his time with Mr Fayed, Mr Cole projected the smooth, sophisticated face of

the Egyptian's ire at not being granted British citizenship. Then came the fight against Jonathan Aitken, former arms procurement minister, and his denials - shown in court to have been lies - that he was entertained at Mr Fayed's Ritz Hotel by Saudi arms dealers. Mr Cole began his career in newspapers before moving into independent television and the BBC. He left 20 years later after telling a number of tabloid reporters details of a secret viewing of the Queen's Christmas speech.

The disclosure was not an unprofessional one - it was the sort of confidence shared by specialist journalists all the time. But the confidence was not kept and the details were splashed over the papers the following day. His position became untenable, but few believed he would leave journalism for ever.

He was not universally popular with those who had to deal with him. He dished out information like favours and was known for his tendency to be smooth to the point of obsequiousness.

And he was slavishly loyal to Mr Fayed, even when the Egyptian's treatment of him appeared to observers to be less than respectful. Once, an *Independent on Sunday* journalist was critical of the store after being shown around by Mr Cole.

During the visit, the journalist was asked by Mr Fayed if he had

children. When he replied 'yes', Mr Fayed ordered Mr Cole to fetch a small teddy bear and a coffee-table book on The Ritz hotel for the journalist.

When the critical article appeared, Mr Cole wrote to the newspaper asking for the gifts back. The book was returned but the bear had already been

given to the child and, with the permission of *The Independent*'s editor, it was retained. For several weeks, Mr Cole wrote at the behest of Mr Fayed asking for the teddy bear back.

On another occasion, a colleague and I visited Mr Fayed as part of efforts to prove that a former minister had accept-

ed diamonds from businessmen for services rendered. We believed Mr Fayed knew the woman buying the diamonds from the MP and asked him to make a phone call to her.

But he could stay on the subject for only a few minutes. Very quickly the conversation moved onto a friend of the woman's.

Photograph: Robin Mayes

Michael Cole, taking early retirement after hectic years representing the Harrods boss

PRODUCT RECALL

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Following the Findus Minced Beef Crispy Pancake Product Recall earlier this week, Findus is now recalling all Findus Crispy Pancakes and Crepes with Best Before End Dates of JUL 99 and AUG 99 as a precautionary measure. This is due to finding small cubic pieces of glass in a second variety of Crispy Pancakes. We emphasise that Findus is taking this precaution in the interests of customer safety.

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Battle under way to block toll road

LOCAL OBJECTORS yesterday won the right to mount a High Court challenge over the planned construction of the United Kingdom's first privately owned toll road.

The Alliance Against the Birmingham Northern Relief Road was granted leave to seek a judicial review, and Mr Justice Ognall ordered an urgent hearing of the case.

The campaign group Friends of the Earth, which is supporting the challenge, said that the alliance, representing communities along the 27-mile route of the proposed road, were demanding to see a concession agreement between the Department of Transport and Midland Expressway to check whether it contained cancellation charges.

Legal opinion from solicitors Leigh, Day and Co was that it was unlawful to consider cancellation charges when approving a road scheme; to sign a concession agreement containing cancellation charges before a scheme was approved; and to refuse to make public a concession agreement affecting the environment.

FOE said that, before the general election, Labour promised it would not build the road because noise and air pollution would harm the health and amenities of residents. But soon after the party came to power, the road was given the go-ahead.

Gerald Kells, of West Midlands FoE, said: "The Government has already broken its promise not to build this road. Now it appears to be preventing people from having access to the facts behind it. If the Government has nothing to hide, then it should come clean and produce the documents."

FOE says the road will cut a huge swath through the West Midlands green belt and cross two protected nature sites, destroying scores of homes and blight many others.

Makers of faulty hip to pay for surgery

By Kate Watson-Smyth

The manufacturers of the artificial hip at the centre of a nationwide health scare yesterday offered to pay for "lifelong follow-up" treatment of all patients who have been issued with the implant.

Following a meeting with 3M Health Care, the makers of the faulty hip joint, and Val Gooding, managing director of BUPA, the Department of Health confirmed that 3M would meet the entire costs of "identifying and reviewing" all patients who were fitted with the 3M Capital implant and any revision operations required.

"These operations may be carried out either in a BUPA hospital or an NHS hospital if the patient prefers," said a statement from the Department.

"The company commitment also extends to life-long follow-up of patients implanted with this device."

Earlier, the Government published a list of hospitals who were supplied with the hip joints. More than 80 private and NHS orthopaedic centres were supplied with a total of 4,700 3M Capital implants between 1 August 1991 and 31 March 1997 when the device

was discontinued. All implants are thought to have been used.

Patients fitted with the joints will be contacted by the hospital where they had the surgery and will be invited to have X-rays. Some people will need to have the prosthesis replaced and others will need to be carefully monitored.

Robin Turner, consultant manager for orthopaedics at Brighton Health Care NHS Trust, said they had already started to trace patients.

"When we have established the names of the 264 people who received this particular hip joint we will arrange for them to return to the hospital for a clinical check-up and X-ray. We anticipate that it will take two to three weeks to cross-check all the medical records to identify the patients concerned."

3M Health Care Ltd, based in Loughborough, could face a total bill of £23m if all 4,700 patients need a revision operation costing £5,000 a time.

The warning about the hip was issued after studies from three hospitals revealed that up to 21 per cent of these implants failed within five years compared with the national average of 10 per cent 10 years after the operation.

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Josephine Hayes: Taking Attorney-General to tribunal

Lord Irvine, and a spot bother with women

Second lawyer puts Lord Chancellor in the dock over 'old boy network'

By byline
title

FRESH allegations of "old boys' networks" in the judiciary surfaced yesterday as a woman barrister announced that she is suing the Attorney-General for sex discrimination.

The case is likely to cause further embarrassment to Lord Irvine of Lairg, the Lord Chancellor, who is in charge of the Attorney-General's office. Two weeks ago, Lord Irvine was himself accused of operating an illegal old boys' network by solicitor Jane Coker, who is also bringing a discrimination case.

Josephine Hayes lodged her complaint against John Morris, the Attorney-General, with an industrial tribunal in south London earlier this week. She is suing on the grounds that the Government shows bias in favour of men when appointing lawyers to represent it in civil cases.

Ms Hayes's lawyer, Sara Leslie of Irvin Mitchell in London, said her client is taking action over appointments to four lists of lawyers used to represent the Government.

Ms Leslie says the names on three of the lists are exclusively male. On the fourth there are



Lord Irvine: Second case likely to embarrass him after being accused of operating an 'old boys' network'

13 women out of 71 names, but this list is known as the supplementary list and deals with more routine and minor cases.

"What Josephine Hayes claims is that she is an excellent candidate for one of these jobs but has never been given the opportunity to be considered or apply. What we are saying is that there is no objective selection criteria and no application of equal

opportunities," said Ms Leslie.

Ms Hayes has a first class law degree from Oxford University and a master's degree from Yale University in America. She is a junior counsel who has been in civil practice for 16 years and is also chairwoman of the Association of Women Barristers.

Ms Leslie said the appointment of lawyers to the lists was

known within the profession as the "secret soundings".

She added: "We understand the Attorney-General makes appointments taking the views of the Treasury Solicitor, government departments, members of the judiciary and senior members of the Bar - what is known as 'secret soundings'."

"Applicants are restricted to barristers these particular people happen to know. The upshot of it is out of 116 barristers serving for the Government in civil proceedings only 13 are women... a very small proportion of the women in practice where 28 per cent of barristers are women."

"Unless the system is transparent there can be no confidence that gender is not a criteria for appointments."

She added: "Sex is an issue because the lists are so predominantly male."

However, the Attorney General yesterday rejected Ms Hayes's claim. A statement from his office said: "The Attorney General rejects any suggestion of discrimination and will strongly oppose this application."

The tribunal is expected to have a hearing within the next three to four months.



Jane Coker: Claims discrimination. Photograph: Ben Gurr

Grace and favours: Lord Chancellor may open refurbished doors to the public

By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

loan of over 80 paintings for the walls of his rooms.

The Prime Minister's spokesman said there were no plans to charge the public for touring the Lord Chancellor's rooms, although the continuing controversy over the £650,000 refurbishment must make them one of the top tourist attractions in the capital.

His latest acquisitions of paintings from four galleries - the Royal Academy, the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, the Imperial War Museum, and the National Gallery of Scotland - are likely to enhance interest in the most controversial interior redesign in London, in spite of the works being dismissed by

Downing Street as "not of the top rank".

The spokesman for Tony Blair denied reports that the artwork which will adorn the walls, themselves to be covered in expensive wallpaper, has been "looted" from Scottish galleries. "One newspaper said they had been removed; it gave the impression they are being

taken away. They have come from their reserve collections. In other words, they are all in cellars. They are not on display. None of them is on a wall anywhere. The galleries are extremely happy they will in due course be on display in the Lord Chancellor's residence which is going to be open to the public."

But that failed to impress

the Scottish National Party leader, Alex Salmond, who said:

"Derry Irvine is displaying a breathtaking arrogance which is entirely in character. His looting and pillaging of Scottish art works will cause great anger both in the artist and academic worlds.

"Taking them down to Derry Irvine's house in London is

nothing to do with access but everything to do with self-aggrandisement."

The Downing Street spokesman said the Lord Chancellor's department was working out access arrangements with House of Lords authorities, though these might take the form of organised access for groups. However, the intention was to secure "significant public access".

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

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Dear Richard and Virgin,

I recently received details of the Virgin Survival Plan. I requested them to see how you are marketing this most essential need, and to offer myself as an example for other people to realise how much it is needed. I am not after sympathy, but would just like to highlight what devastation, if not covered, illness can leave behind.

In 1994 at the age of 31, I suffered a heart attack (something that I believe is happening more and more to younger people). I was not, regrettably, covered for such an eventuality, being so young.

Being self-employed, I had to get back to work asap. I had a mortgage at mid-term, a wife and two young children to support. What I received from the state was a pittance. I was compelled to return to work much earlier than we would have liked. Without realising it, I was pitching myself into a downward spiral that would further affect my health. When I returned to work, I found that just to survive I now had to work longer and harder to cover the debt I'd accumulated during the period of illness. This, I'm afraid, had the eventual effect in May 1997 of a second attack. I've now got over this

second setback and again have returned somewhat prematurely to work. With the overall accumulated debt, we were staring ultimate ruin in the face if I had not done this. Since going back to work, after being back for only one month, I have been signed off sick again with angina (chest pains).

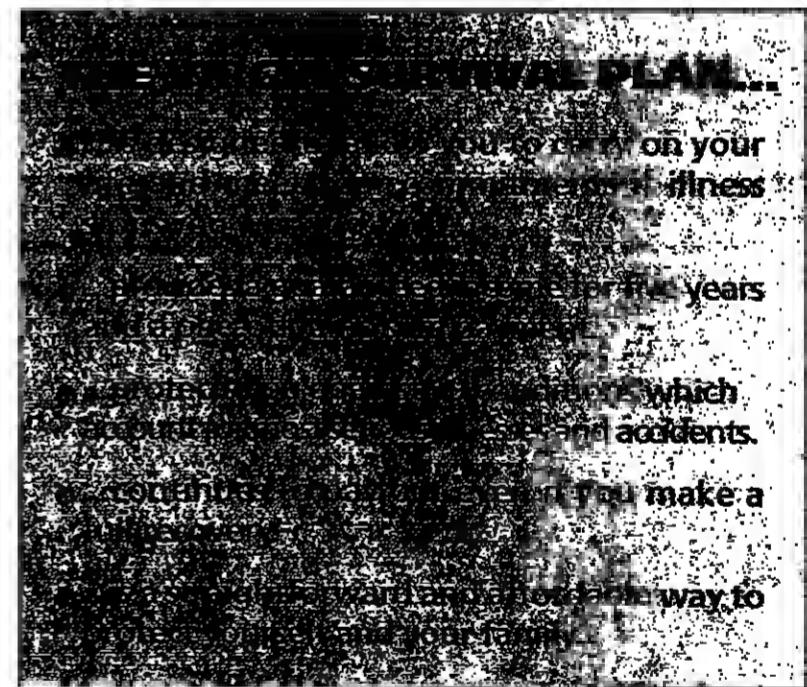
I can not stress strongly enough how important it is, specially for younger people with mortgages and families, to get this cover, as I feel that with the same hindsight, and five years to get back on my feet, I would without doubt not be in the position that I find myself in today.

I'm not after sympathy, but implore you to hammer home the need for this, so that as few families as possible have to go through this devastating situation.

Yours sincerely,

A. R. Salmon

Andrew Robert Salmon



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How Britain lags behind the rest of Europe



WORLDS APART

By Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Britain has little statutory childcare provision and little help with childcare for mothers. Usually the limited number of public childcare places available are for children deemed to be "at risk".

Comparing Britain with three other countries shows the greater state involvement in caring for children with twofold purposes: to encourage par-



ents into employment and to help children to develop.

Only 41 per cent of lone mothers in Britain are employed, compared to 82 per cent

in France, and 70 per cent in Sweden.

In Europe only Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland have lower employment rates.

This week *The Independent* launched its campaign for a tax allowance for working mothers, urging the Chancellor to invest in the nation's children.

Parents in Britain pay a higher percentage of the cost of childcare than in virtually any other advanced economy. We feel there are lessons to be

learned from other countries and with 1.1 million women expected to enter the workforce by 2006 unless something is done about childcare we face se-

rious problems. In France childcare is heavily subsidised and there is a long tradition of early childhood education in the public sector.

After crèches for 0-three-year-olds, the state makes universal educational provision for children aged three to school-entry age at *écoles maternelles*, which are provided to help parents in employment but also to help the child develop.

These state-funded institutions are an accepted way of life for children and 35 per cent of three to six-year olds attend.

In recent years, two-year-olds have been admitted and the handful of *écoles maternelles* that are run privately receive state subsidies.

Alternatively, French families can employ an *assistante maternelle*, or childminder. They receive financial support in the form of a grant and a payment to cover social security contributions.

For schoolchildren up to 17 years there are recreation centres, *Centre de Loisirs sans Hébergement*, that provide care from 3am to 6pm or 7pm. These come under the Ministry for Youth and Sport at a local level and are sometimes subsidised by private companies.

Scandinavia has long been seen as a symbol of child-friendly

French without tears: A writing class across the Channel, where things are much better organised. Photograph: Raphael Gaillarde/FSP

ly policies. In Sweden, public funds meet the costs of day care for 72 per cent of three to six-year-olds (compulsory schooling does not start until seven).

Parents are provided with *daghem* - day-care centres, typically open between 6am and 6.30pm and for those who want to stay at home to look after their children, they qualify for payment by the state of 360 days or 90 per cent of their previous income, plus an additional 90 days on a flat daily rate of SKr60 (about £6).

Other services include *Sesjöverksamhet*, pre-primary schooling for children and *Fritidshem*, centres providing care and recreation for school-age children up to 12 years.

The US is one of the countries Britain is watching most closely after President Bill Clinton's State of the Union address last month.

In America the drive to get lone parents off welfare has been run in conjunction with more childcare provision.

The President announced last month that \$20bn will be spent over the next five years on childcare to help working families pay for care, build after-school programmes and emphasise quality of care through research and monitoring. The number of children receiving childcare subsidies will double to 2 million by the year 2003 and tax credits are also to be increased for three million families.

A new tax credit will also be offered to businesses that offer childcare services to their employees. After-school care will also be opened up to 500,000 children - at present there are five million latchkey kids in the US.

Head Start, the scheme for children from a deprived background which has shown good results, has also been given more money to reach 1m children by 2002.

Why it's easier being a mother in France

FRENCH VIEW

By Lucy Reid
in Paris

there is no official means test, parents must submit evidence of their income, as all establishments are required to balance the number of low and high-income families. Fees are variable according to how many children attend (the more children you have, the cheaper it is).

The "assistante maternelle agréée libérée" (registered childminder operating in her own home) is a more expensive possibility, but the most favoured method of childcare in France. Two out of three children under the age of three are looked after by childminders.

Any parent, regardless of income, can claim benefits to cover the cost of the childminder's National Insurance charges and claim 25 per cent of the childminder's fees (up to £1,500 per child) against tax.

Mothers working only part-time can turn to "Haltes-Garderies". Children (from 0-6 years) are admitted for three sessions a week (12 hours in total). Single parents and students can have five sessions a week.

Fourthly, there is the state nursery school (La Maternelle). Admission is from the age of two, on the strict condition that the child is potty-trained. In practice, priority is given to older children, because of a shortage of places. Nursery school is free for all, but less well-off families, single-parent families and families with two working parents go to the top of the waiting lists.

Finally, parents wishing to have their child looked after at home can claim the "Aide à la Garde de l'Enfant à Domicile" (Aid for looking after children at home), which the Socialist government cut last year. The AGED, available to two working parents earning less than £30,000, now provides a tax break of up to £3,600 a year per child under three and less for older children and wealthier parents.

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هذا من الأصل

Lottery firm is given deadline to come clean

By Kate Watson-Smyth

The Camelot shareholders GTech have been given 17 days to prove they are "fit and proper" to be involved in running the National Lottery, it was announced yesterday.

John Stoker, acting regulator of Ofot, said he was satisfied all links between GTech and its disgraced former director Guy Snowden had been severed in the wake of allegations that he tried to bribe Richard Branson, but he said the company still needed to dispel concerns over its ethics and business practices before it could decide whether Camelot should carry on running the lottery.

The company has been given until 9 March to give assurances on the legality of GTech's business practices both past and present around the world. Under terms of the National Lottery Act, the licence to run the game can be revoked if any person managing the lottery or benefiting from it "is not a fit and proper person to do so."

Mr Snowden, the then head

of US-based GTech, resigned nearly three weeks ago after Mr Branson was awarded £100,000 in damages over Mr Snowden's alleged attempt to bribe him into abandoning his attempt to secure the franchise.

The jury accepted that the Virgin tycoon was telling the truth when he claimed that Mr Snowden offered the bribe as the two men lunched at Mr Branson's London home in 1993. Following an initial investigation in the wake of the hearing, Mr Stoker, who was appointed acting regulator after Peter Davis's resignation, said he noted that no evidence had been put forward during the hearing that the board of GTech had been involved in the attempted bribe.

He added that no GTech officials had been found guilty of wrongdoing in the US "in the furtherance of GTech's interests".

But he said: "I have noted also the gravity of the fact that Mr Snowden, as chairman and chief executive of the company, offered a bribe to Mr Branson;

the view expressed by Mr Branson and others that he did so as the company's *alter ego*; and continuing concern about some of GTech's apparent business practices in the United States.

"I have asked the board of GTech Holdings Corporation, by March 9 to provide me with evidence in support of their fitness and propriety to be involved in and benefit from the UK National Lottery.

"Having considered their representations ... I will reach my conclusions on whether it would be appropriate for me to take further action under the National Lottery Act 1993."

He added that he was satisfied that Mr Snowden's resignation from the board of GTech and its US parent company, GTech Corporation, had removed him from influence over the UK Lottery. Although Mr Snowden still has a 1 per cent shareholding in GTech, Mr Stoker said this was not grounds enough to revoke Camelot's licence.

But he warned that shareholding were to grow in future, giving Mr Snowden influence

Redwood takes to the road

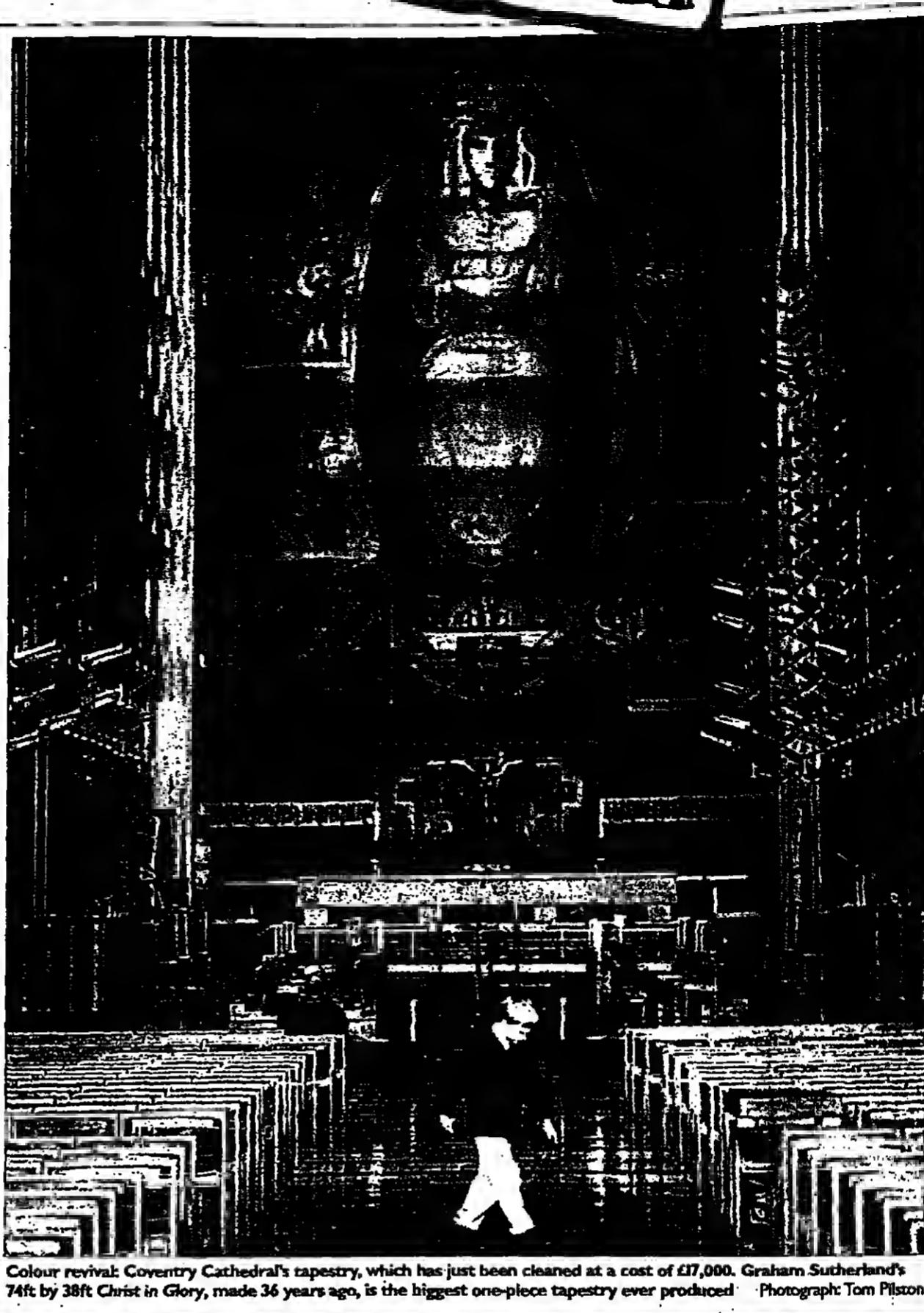
By Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

John Redwood is planning to bounce back after being slapped down by William Hague by spearheading a 'Tory roadshow' to the risks facing Britain over the single currency.

The shadow trade and industry secretary, who was forced to withdraw critical comments about the City of London honouring Chancellor Helmut Kohl, will begin a tour of Moot

day in Sunderland. What is certain to be dubbed the Redwood Euro-sceptic roadshow has dates set for Newcastle, Edinburgh, Reading, Birmingham, Manchester and Exeter.

Mr Hague's approval for the leading Euro-sceptic to take a tour on the single currency will dismay pro-euro "grandees" of the party led by Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke, who are holding a pro-Euro seminar at the Commons next month with business leaders.



Colour revival: Coventry Cathedral's tapestry, which has just been cleaned at a cost of £17,000. Graham Sutherland's 74ft by 38ft Christ in Glory, made 36 years ago, is the biggest one-piece tapestry ever produced. Photograph: Tom Pilston

Courts to accept digital evidence

Pictures and images produced from digital technology can be safely used as evidence in courts, a House of Lords committee said yesterday.

But the Lords select committee on science and technology called for greater control over closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance systems operating in public places.

It also warned that public confidence in CCTV systems would be damaged if images from them were passed too often to television companies for entertainment use.

The Lords inquiry, which took evidence from the Crown Prosecution Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "We were pleased to find that digital images, which we initially thought might create difficulties for the courts, do not." But it recommended new measures to authenticate the images.

Chaired by Lord Craig of Radley, the committee also suggested there should be a uniform policy on the control and release of CCTV images from publicly owned surveillance systems. It quoted a case where images of a man attempting to commit suicide were released by Brentwood Council to the BBC, prompting the man to seek a judicial review. The High Court, however, found there had been no breach of the law.

The committee also said it had learned that police authorities might be paid by the media for tapes used in a variety of television programmes.

The human rights organisation Justice welcomed the committee's call for tighter controls. Its senior legal officer, Madeleine Colvin, said: "CCTV is more than a tool for reducing crime. It also provides the ability to watch and record people in public places. It therefore raises important civil liberties issues."



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Chemicals, bugs and deadly toxins – the new

ANTHRAX

Symptoms: Fever, malaise, fatigue, cough and mild chest discomfort is followed by severe respiratory distress with dyspnoea, diaphoresis, stridor and cyanosis. Shock and death occurs within 24 to 36 hours of severe symptoms.

History: Anthrax spores were weaponised by the US in the 1950s and 1960s before the programme was terminated. As recently as 1995 Iraq admitted to weaponising anthrax.

Treatment: It is usually not effective after symptoms are present, however the US Army medical management suggests high dose antibiotic treatment with penicillin, ciprofloxacin or doxycycline.

BUTOLINUM

Symptoms: Stomach pains, dizziness, diarrhoea, muscular weakness. The whole body including the muscles of the respiratory system become paralysed, leading to death by suffocation within days.

History: Several countries have admitted to weaponising botulinum toxins, including Iraq. In 1995 it was revealed that Iraq not only researched, but had filled and deployed more than 100 munitions with botulinum toxins.

Lethal dosage: The most lethal substance known to man. One teaspoon can kill 7 million people.

Treatment: A vaccine is available for those at high risk of exposure, but must be taken in advance. No known antidote after the symptoms appear.

Charles Arthur, Science Editor, on how to make the weapons, while Nicholas von Herberstein looks at their history and lethal effect

THE NEWS that you can buy anthrax by mail order may come as a shock to many, but a decade ago two experts in the field of chemical and biological weapons noted that in the United States, "marijuana is more closely regulated... than access to and distribution of most deadly biological cultures". And we all know how successful the "war on drugs" has been in the US.

Today, anthrax is still on sale: the American Type Culture Collection in Rockville, Maryland, offers four different kinds – shipped freeze-dried, and costing about \$140 (£88) for a sample. The ATCC describes its mission as "to acquire, authenticate, and maintain reference cultures related biological materials, and associated data, and to distribute these to qualified scientists in government, industry, and education". Its catalogue contains thousands of samples of viruses, bacteria and other toxins.

However, as investigators have noted, persuading the ATCC that you are a suitably qualified scientist is "about as difficult as forging a prescription".

Considering that, and the fact that you can produce enough chlorine to kill at least one person (probably yourself) using items found under most household sinks, the question is: why do terrorists rarely choose to wage war using biological or chemical weapons?

The broad answer is that their toxicity makes them far

more dangerous to manufacture and handle than a standard bomb. Few would have the confidence, or the training, of the members of the Red Army Faction, which in 1984 was discovered to be growing the bacterial botulinum toxin in a bathtub.

Intelligence experts reckon that proper growth and control of a bacterial toxin requires expertise not only in graduate-level microbiology, but also in pathology, aerosol physics and even meteorology, because not

only do you have to grow your bug in a bacterial brewery (costing some thousands of pounds), you also have to know how to distribute it without killing yourself first, and without it dying in the flask – deadly microbes are often surprisingly sensitive.

Toxins and organisms such as ricin, bubonic plague and anthrax probably pose more danger to the terrorist than the target. In addition, there's always an incubation period before the effect of any attack will be

seen, creating the problem of whether to claim responsibility early on (which might allow vaccination and precautions) or wait, and perhaps discover that your efforts are ignored.

By contrast, the dedicated mass-murderer might think that chemical weapons such as sarin and VX (both nerve agents) and mustard gas sound preferable. Both have clearly visible effects within minutes of exposure. But it's the manufacture and release which pose the major

hurdle. Although biopoint-pen ink and insecticides are both, according to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, "only one chemical step away from sarin", it is a big step.

Producing nerve agents and other chemical weapons requires the manipulation of reagents such as hydrofluoric acid and organophosphates, and it's critical to get the temperatures and amounts correct, or you end up with a relatively harmless soup.

For all those reasons, only

the cultish terrorist groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Group and Aum Shinri Kyo, which attracted highly educated people, have opted for such means.

Of course, for Iraq, which has a number of very intelligent and well-trained scientists, such technologies are relatively easy to obtain and fund. But the uncertainty factor, such as the problem if the wind blows chemical weapons back into your own territory, generally forecloses their use.

SARIN

Symptoms: Runny nose, tightness of chest, dimming of vision, drooling, involuntary urination or defecation, twitching, jerking, convulsion, coma and loss of breath and death.

History: Sarin was first developed by Dr Gerhard Schrader in 1938, but mass produced by the US after the Second World War.

Treatment: Self-injection of Atropine or oxime into the thigh. Auto injectors are military only; not available to general public.

Lethal dosage: A small quantity splashed on the skin will produce enough vapours to exceed the lethal dosage (one teaspoon of sarin can kill 10,000 people).

VX

Symptoms: Runny nose, tightness of chest, dimming of vision, drooling, involuntary urination or defecation, twitching, jerking, convulsion, coma and finally cessation of breathing and death.

History: A technological improvement over the sarin gas, mass production of VX began in the United States in 1961.

Treatment: Self-injection of Atropine or oxime into the thigh. Though not available to general public, auto injectors are issued to all military forces as part of their NBC equipment.

Lethal dosage: Dermally VX is 300 times more toxic than sarin. The amount one can place on the head of a pin is sufficient to produce death in a human being.



War ritual: Israeli dancers wearing plastic sheets and gas masks perform at a 'germ warfare' party in a Tel Aviv nightclub early yesterday. Photograph: AFP

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DIY terrorist's arsenal



William Leavitt (left) and Larry Harris in court in Nevada, charged with possession of germ warfare agent

Anthrax scare shocks America

By Tim Cornwell in Los Angeles

AMERICANS reeled from the shock of a major terrorist scare yesterday, with television news and talk shows filled with discussion of an alleged anthrax plot in Nevada.

But the details of the affair, in which two men were arrested and charged with possession of the deadly germ warfare agent, became increasingly murky.

As the United States prepared for military action against Iraq, justified in large part by its alleged chemical and biological weapons program, Larry Harris, 46, and William Leavitt, 47, appeared in a Nevada courtroom laden with leg and arm shackles.

Test results were awaited yesterday to determine whether they had indeed been driving down the Las Vegas strip with an-

thrax in the boot of their car. Harris, a trained microbiologist, had ties to a far-right white supremacist group, the Aryan Nations, as recently as 1995, claiming the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Hours after an informant reported he had boasted of possessing "military-grade" anthrax, a team of 100 FBI agents and police swooped on the two men.

President Bill Clinton was briefed personally on the case. But a lawyer for Leavitt described his client as a respectable businessman and former Mormon bishop who was interested in investing in radical treatments for victims of biological warfare.

Harris has claimed to be testing a ray machine that kills toxic bacteria like anthrax and bubonic plague. Tests continued yesterday on the car the men were driving, which was isolated and wrapped in plastic

at a US airbase. Eight to 10 leather bags marked "biological" and stashed in the boot were apparently the focus of the FBI.

But Leavitt's lawyer predicted that scientists would find only anthrax vaccine used on farm animals. When the news broke residents of suburban Henderson, near Las Vegas, flooded local radio stations with calls asking whether they should evacuate.

With many questions still to be answered about the case, it was Harris' name that apparently triggered the massive response. Last year, he pleaded guilty to acquiring plague bacteria by mail order from a laboratory, but claimed his research for a book was aimed at preventing rather than causing biological terror. The FBI affidavit, however, said that last summer, he had spoken of his plans to unleash bubonic plague toxin in the New York subway.

How cult caused death on the Tokyo subway

AT THE height of the morning rush hour on 20 March 1995, commuters on three lines on the Tokyo subway began to notice an unpleasant smell. Many began to feel sick, others suffered headaches and pain in their eyes. By the time the trains stopped at the stations, disgorging thousands of fainting, vomiting passengers, the damage had been done, writes Richard Lloyd Parry.

Twelve people died and more than 5,000 others suffered ill-effects, ranging from temporary nausea to post-traumatic mental illness and permanent coma. The sense of shock in Japan, a country with low rates of violent crime and no history of domestic terrorism, was incalculable.

The Tokyo nerve-gas attack, an attempt to kick-start the Apocalypses by a religious cult named Aum Shinri Kyo, was the first terrorist use of chemical weapons. That a bunch of Buddhist crackpots in white pyjamas could manufacture the nerve gas sarin and release it into the middle of the world's biggest city caused alarm not just in Japan, but in security agencies around the world.

The story of Aum is in some ways illustrates the difficulties in the large-scale amateur manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. If the sarin attack owed much to the ingenuity of the Aum leader, Shoko Asahara, it also had a lot to do with the incompetence of the Japanese



Shoko Asahara: Built laboratories on Mt Fuji

UN fears over Iraqi armoury

By Fran Abrams
and Andrew Marshall

DESPITE seven years of inspections, the United Nations still fears that Iraq harbours a huge potential armoury of chemical and biological weapons.

The Uncom executive chairman, Richard Butler, says in his latest report that Iraq could produce as much as 200 tons (180 metric tons) of the deadly nerve agent VX and continues to conceal information about its missile warheads.

Mr Butler reported after meetings in Iraq last month that his previously "businesslike" talks with the Iraqis had been punctuated by "abuse" and "denigration." Although the change of manner came in a dispute over access to eight "presidential sites," Mr Butler's reports show there is real cause for concern.

The sites are huge and contain other buildings, including warehouses as well as palaces.

UN inspectors who have been working to identify and destroy Iraq's armoury since 1991 have reported mixed progress. Most of Saddam Hussein's missiles and a large number of chemical weapons had been destroyed, they said, but there were real fears about his biological warfare programme.

The information given by Iraq about biological weapons had been inaccurate and often contradictory. However, it was believed that it held quantities of aflatoxin, which destroys the immune system, botulinum toxin, stimulant B and anthrax spores.

On occasions Aum members attempted to disperse anthrax and botulinum in Tokyo, but the anticipated decimation of the city never took place.

The Iraqis have admitted filling R400 bombs with anthrax

spores and botulinum toxin, though it is not known how many. The latest bulletin from the country's officials "fails to give a remotely credible account of Iraq's biological warfare programme."

Similar problems existed with chemical weapons, though there had been more progress. Before the Gulf War, Iraq had procured more than 1,000 items of production equipment for chemical weapons including mustard shells, which cause terrible skin damage. Agent VX, a highly toxic nerve agent used against the Kurds at Halabja and sarin, the nerve agent used in Nazi gas chambers.

In his latest draft report, the chief UN weapons inspector concludes that Iraq could produce as much as 200 tons (180 metric tons) of VX. Because the UN experts have not been able to assess Iraq's abilities, "there is an credible technical reason why Iraq should fail in the production of VX," the report says.

Uncom had supervised the destruction of 325 pieces of equipment along with 275 tons of "precursor chemicals" for the weapons. However, much of the equipment was only discovered in August 1997 and inspectors believe the Iraqi government has thousands of tons of chemicals which could be used to make weapons.

Of 819 long-range missiles imported by President Saddam in the 1980s, 817 had been accounted for. More than 500 had been used in the Iran-Iraq war, 93 in the Gulf War and 77 in training and testing. The rest had been destroyed, either unilaterally or under supervision by Uncom.

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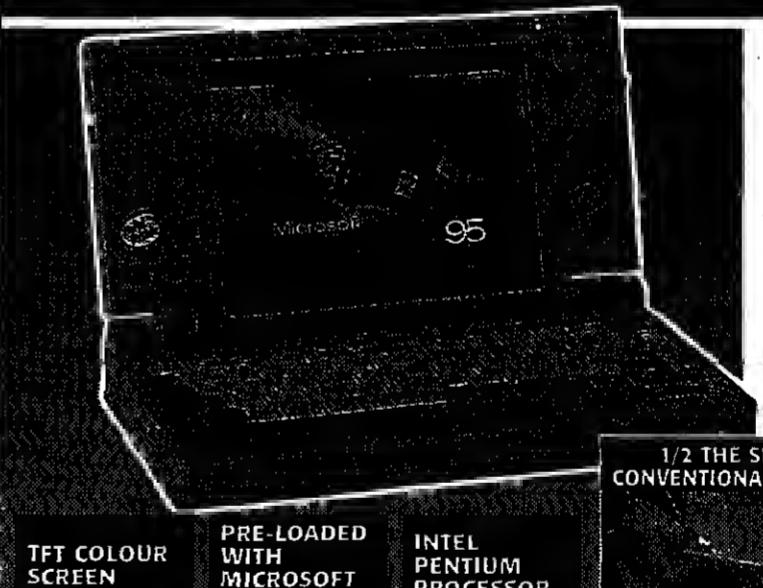


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Armada of doom lies in wait for Saddam

Emma Daly, on a US aircraft-carrier in the Gulf, watches preparations for war

THE flight-deck of an aircraft-carrier, 60ft above the sea, is an awe-inspiring place to be, an absurd triumph of planning over common sense. Who would have thought that 4.5 acres of non-slip surface could act as runway to dozens of jet fighters, screaming on and off at over 100mph, aided by steam-powered catapults and heavy cables?

The menace behind Kofi Annan's peace mission is embodied by the USS *George Washington* and USS *Independence*, the carriers leading 18 sister ships of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet through the jade waters of the Gulf. If Mr Annan's mission fails and the US decides to strike at Iraq, a deadly wave launched at sea will signal the start of Operation Desert Thunder.

The first-time visitor can only stand, slack-jawed, as the ship's company, wearing colour-coded "flight coats", or life-jackets, load missiles, clean windscreens or signal pilots during the 100 sorties the 70-plus planes fly a day. Take-off involves pinning the aircraft's nose to the steel head of a catapult. Engines roar, steam pressure builds, then suddenly a pin snaps and the plane is rocketed down the runway and towards the water, or the Gulf.

To save space, planes move around on deck with their wings folded back like flies or bent up at right-angles, allowing crew-



Right stuff: Pilots kitting out on the aircraft-carrier USS George Washington for a sortie in F-14 fighters

Photograph: Reuters

men to manoeuvre them into tiny spaces, wing-tips touching, for storage on the runway or in the hangar below.

It is impressive enough to stand on the flight-deck and feel the power of the aircraft launching; it is positively awe-inspiring to fly off the ship under catapult power, even in a COD, as the small transport planes that bring in mail and visitors are known, and which does 0 to 139mph in less than three seconds; an F-14 Tomcat fighter will reach 175mph by the time it leaves the 310ft runway. Passengers in a COD, who sit facing the tail and firmly strapped in by a harness, are ordered to grip the belts across the chest, brace their feet on the seat in front and lean forward for the "cat shot".

Adrenalin starts pumping

(particularly around the quaking body of the nervous flyer) and then, with a rust and a whoosh from the crew, you are flung back in your seat by an overwhelming force (about 8 to 10G) - but only for a couple of seconds. There is a sudden release and the plane is climbing, smoothly and calmly, away from the carrier. God only knows what it must feel like in a jet fighter.

"Recovery" is another ar-

resting experience: the shortest, sharpest landing you could have without actually crashing. In-

coming pilots lower a straight bar with a shallow hook at the end and then aim for one of four steel cables stretched across the runway. The idea is to drop the wheels between wires three and four, so that the hook snags the third cable and drags the aircraft to a halt 300ft along the runway, which does not stretch the full quarter-mile length of the ship.

"You're basically trying to land in about a 10ft square area," said Lieutenant Greg Harville, a COD pilot who flew us off the *George Washington*. "The first few times it is terrifying."

Cables are checked each day, and each one is changed after it has caught 100 planes.

If a cable were to break - and it has happened - it would whip back and kill anyone in the way. The sounds of a landing, or "trap", reverberate throughout the 17-deck ship, but anyone passing the engine-room where the arresting gear operates is

practically deafened by the screech as the cable rips out to catch 30 tons of jet fighter.

Of course, landing on the carrier doesn't just involve touching down. First you must survive the "carrier break", something aircrews explain to helpless civilians with some relish and which is supposed to slow the aircraft down. What this means is that, as you approach the ship flying low over the sea, the pilot yanks it to one side: the water appears at right

angles as you hang in your seat, heart in your mouth, before it levels off for landing.

The fighters come in at about 145mph; the other planes slow down to 95mph or so - still quite an emergency stop. And everyone comes in on full throttle, because if you miss the wire, the sea looms large and extremely close and you had better be able to take off at once, be it as a bolter. Thankfully, we only watched the night flights - launch and recovery

continues as normal after dark. Each carrier is loaded with 4,600,000lb of ammunition. The US armada in the Gulf carries 18,690 sailors and marines and 93 strike aircraft, along with planes that can listen to radar, and radio and jam enemy signals. It includes the USS *Gator*, an amphibious assault ship carrying attack helicopters, and eight ships (including two submarines) that can fire Tomahawk cruise missiles, with a range of 1,000 miles.

Reuters, Kuwait

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The Forum Hotel London

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Rate (per room per weekend) £129

The 2 for 1 deal is also available at Inter-Continental and Forum hotels in Brussels, Berlin and Budapest. Special selection of other Inter-Continental Hotels in Europe - Paris, Vienna, Rome, Cannes and Prague (prices on application).

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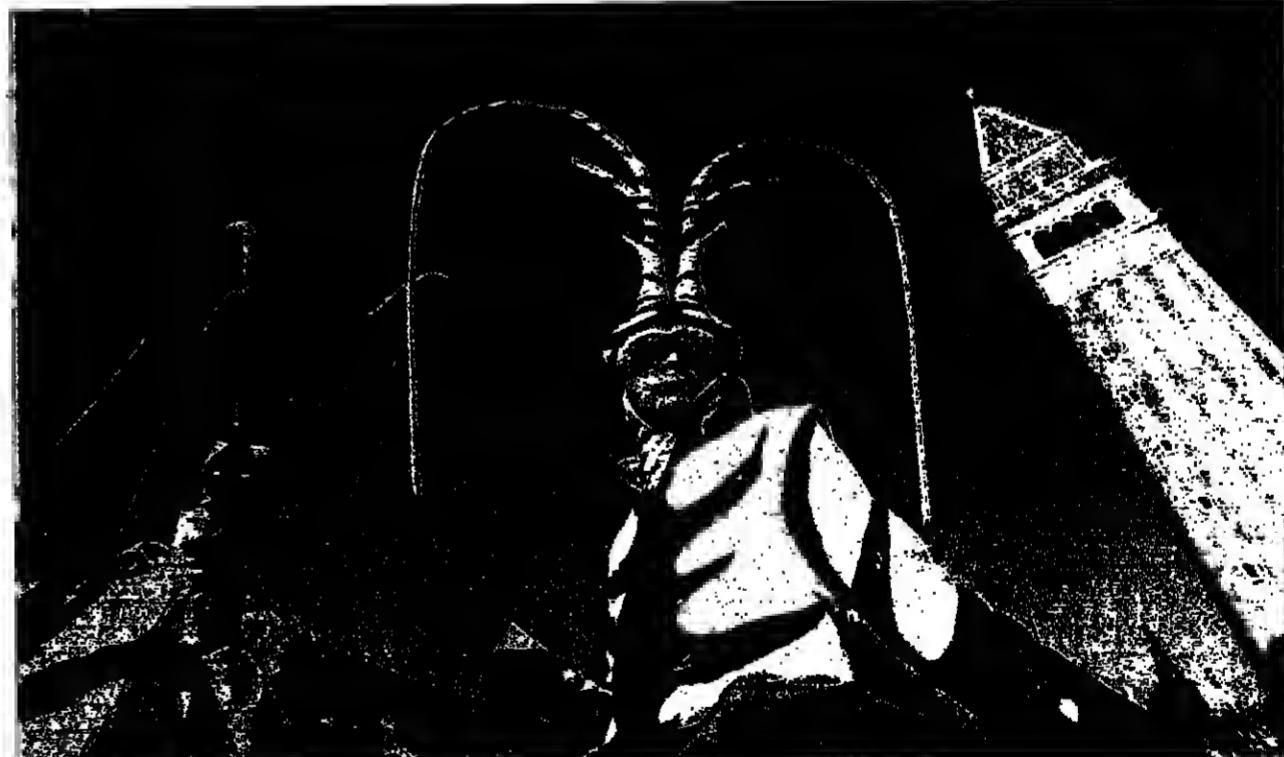
Venice is all dressed up for carnival time. But where is the party?



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
BRIAN
HARRIS



Set pieces in St Mark's Square: Tourists gather at dusk to watch the carnival performers. Bottom, Mihai Chemiakin's newly unveiled statue of Casanova, who stopped by for coffee at Cafe Florian (below left) on his escape from jail



In Casanova's day it was an excuse for wildness, says Andrew Gumbel. Now the tourists have taken over

THE PEACOCK couple made their assignation by the waterfront outside the Doge's place. With the glint of the morning sun on their saffron and periwinkle blue costumes, they gave each other a low styled kiss and stared intently into the beaky white masks hiding their faces.

In the bawdy days of carnivals past, this might have been a lovers' tryst to crown a night of flirtatious debauchery. But in modern-day Venice, it was something altogether less exciting. The peacock couple waited for a small crowd to gather round them, unfolded their arms to reveal a gold-sequinned interior of their costumes (to "oohs" and applause as they did) and spent the next 10 minutes being photographed by Japanese tourists.

It is hard to think of the Venice carnival these days as much more than a glorified photo opportunity. Granted, those meticulously tailored costumes - the ro-

bustly coloured harlequin suits and soft velvet douilles, the diabolical black-hooded capes and plunging multi-coloured ball gowns - look fantastic against the irresistible backdrop of the Piazza San Marco. It is remarkable that the designers and wearers of these outlandish outfits should spontaneously travel to Venice from the four corners of the world for the sheer pleasure of showing them off to the tourist groups and adult-education photography classes who have dutifully followed them into town.

But where are the parties that made carnival famous for the length of Venice's memorable decline in the 18th century? And where are the Venetians? By day, the carnival figures look like mannequins or stray theatrical extras, not the revellers they represent. By night, they are nowhere to be seen; for all but a handful of the festive 10 days the city slumps into its habitual

slumber shortly after the bars and restaurants close around 11 o'clock.

Native Venetians make that sure they reach their souvenir shops and tourist restaurants early to catch the excellent pass-

ing trade, but otherwise carnival appears to leave them thoroughly apathetic. Most of the old city's population are pensioners who cannot stand the idea of late-night noise; rather than encouraging the festiv-

ities, they have recently been devoting their energies to closing one of Venice's few remaining rock venues.

When the Venice carnival was revived after a long hiatus in the late Seventies, the idea was to stage a proper festival, with music, poetry and plays oozing out of the city's theatres. But as the tourist numbers have swelled, all but one of the city's theatres have closed - or, as in the case of the Fenice opera house, burned down - leaving little by way of carnival venues.

The lone Teatro Goldoni is doing its best this year, putting on a crowded programme of events, including a play, a musical and concerts by Elvis Costello and David Byrne. Last night, Piazza San Marco hosted the inevitable masked ball, while tomorrow will see a parade of torchlit boats around the lagoon illuminated by fireworks.

These are isolated high spots, however. The event would seem strangely bloodless to the man providing the theme of this year's carnival, the pan-European bed-hopper and occasional spy Giacomo Casanova, who died exactly 200 years ago

and now has a statue to his name gracing the waterfront near the Bridge of Sighs.

In Casanova's day, carnival started in October and carried on until Lent. The masks and costumes broke down barriers of class and propriety and provided the perfect excuse for everyone, from noble ladies to footmen, to broaden the range and number of their sexual conquests.

Hair was piled outrageously high and necklines cut outrageously low, revellers would proceed from parades of wild animals, jugglers and tumblers to the theatre, and on to all-night sessions in gambling dens and whorehouses before appearing, dishevelled and exhausted, for the ritual morning parade of debauchees at the Rialto vegetable market.

Ah, those were the days. Venice is no longer a city of hedonistic decadence but rather a city of tourist scam artists and rip-off merchants who do not deserve the riches of their unique urban environment. Carnival can provide pretty colours, polite artistic events and the occasional high-profile concert. But if you are looking for a party, go to Rio.



Native Venetians make that sure they reach their souvenir shops and tourist restaurants early to catch the excellent pass-

Freetown emerges from the shadow of death

Life is returning to normal in the Sierra Leone capital, says Ed McLoughlin in Freetown

With its easy-going Creole culture and pleasantly seedy, balcony-lined streets, Freetown has long been known as the New Orleans of Africa. Now, following the flight of Major John Paul Koroma and his street gang junta, it feels like New Orleans during Mardi Gras.

A week after the first Nigerian peace-keeping troops fought their way into the town centre something approaching normal life has returned to the chaotic streets of Sierra Leone's capital. Colourfully dressed women haggle on the pavements over cloths spread with lollipops, razor blades or rice, while a scattering of watchful male faces marks the return of the first Lebanese traders after eight months in exile.

Only the unusually low number of cars and the occasional heat of burnt rubble testify to the nightmare which Freetown has lived since Koroma and his fellow junior officers seized power from elected President Ahmad Kabbah in May last year. The cars were mostly stolen early on, while the houses were burnt more recently, destroyed by vindictive junta fighters after the Nigerians began advancing on Freetown two weeks ago.

"They just went around attacking people and burning houses," said Henry Conteh, a Freetown businessman. "They said if the AFRC [Armed Forces Ruling Council] can't have Freetown then nobody's going to have Freetown."

Conteh was hitching near a Nigerian checkpoint on Main



A little boy in a soldier's helmet sitting at a Nigerian Ecomog checkpoint in Freetown this week as the city recovers from its occupation by rebels
Photograph: Popperfoto/Reuters

are now moving to clear them out of the countryside."

Despite reports of renewed rebel raids in the central regions around Bo and Kenema the Nigerians say they can finish "mopping up" soon. Several senior junta leaders have already fallen into Ecomog hands and are being held in Freetown until President Kabbah returns to office, possibly some time next week. Koroma himself remains at large, however. According to Colonel Khoobe, he was last heard of on Thursday when he unsuccessfully tried to fly from a northern air-strip into neighbouring Liberia.

At least 200 people are believed to have died in the fighting in Freetown alone, although some of these were junta fighters or sympathisers caught and lynched by townspeople. Several hundred more surrendered or were captured.

For the Nigerian officers involved in planning and executing "Opera Sand Storm" last week the public welcome must have come as a pleasant change. Feared and disliked at home as agents of General Sani Abacha's repressive military government, Nigeria's soldiers are banned from travelling in most Western countries, including Britain. The November 1995 execution of dissident writer Ken Saro-Wiwa shocked the international community into imposing limited sanctions against Nigeria.

But the people of Freetown, delighted to be rid of Koroma and his gun-toting thugs, are not inclined to look too hard at their liberators' credentials.

Motor Road: although once prosperous, he too lost his car to the junta fighters.

The general looting of vehicles had ruined his business selling spares. But, he admitted, he felt great. "I am so pleased this thing is over. For so long now we have lived in the valley of the shadow of death." One of the few remaining embassy officials in town put it another way: "People are so glad these days, you know what they are all saying? They are saying to each other happy new year. Happy new year and a Merry Christmas."

Sierra Leone's internation-

ally respected ambassador to the UN tried to negotiate with the junta shortly after the coup and emerged, dismayed, to tell journalists that the soldiers' main demand seemed to be a large sum of money - later reported to be £30m.

"And," he added, "they want 18 months in office to loot further. That is all they want to do. It is just shameful."

Even more shocking to many was the merger between Sierra Leone's army and the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) announced short-

ly after the coup. This confirmed what many ordinary people had long been alleging: that the bloody civil war which had killed over 20,000 people (nearly all civilians) since 1991 and displaced a third of the 4.5 million population had all along been conducted at the combatants' mutual convenience, to give both sets of gunmen an opportunity to pillage to their hearts' content.

"We saw them all going around Freetown, stealing and killing and raping women," said Abdulli Bah, once a favourite

driver for visiting journalists, now bereft without his (suлен) car. "We saw that there was no difference between the RUF and the Sierra Leone army. The only thing was that amongst themselves the RUF maybe had more discipline."

Nigeria's supposedly spontaneous liberation of the embargoed city, officially sparked off by a minor clash at the nearby air-strip of Hastings two weeks ago, was met by cheering crowds. A week later groups of children are still cheering at passing military convoys.

£10 Conran lunch

INDEPENDENT

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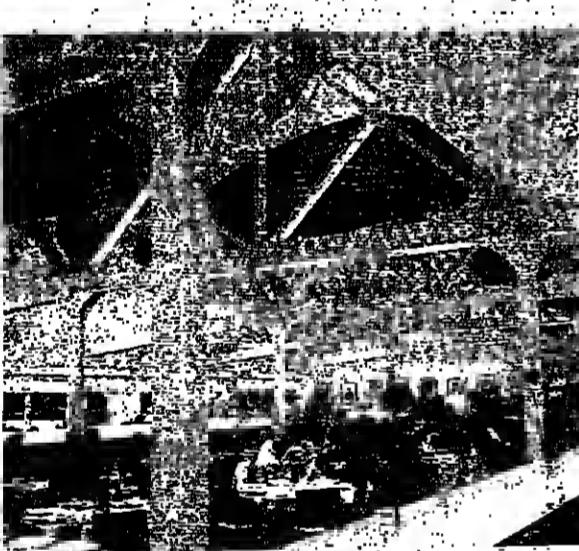
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THE INDEPENDENT



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The Independent and Independent on Sunday in association with Terence Conran are delighted to offer readers the opportunity to enjoy lunch or early evening supper at six of London's top restaurants throughout January and February for £10.

From Monday January 5th until Saturday February 28th, the following establishments are offering readers a two course lunch or early evening supper for just £10 per person.

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Surprisingly ordinary prices



A new breed of Nineties women is turning away from marriage and children in favour of success at work. Clare Garner finds out why

Single for sake of their careers

A growing band of Nineties women is electing to be single, forsaking all others in favour of their careers. They are thirty-somethings, spouse-free and childless, who enjoy their own company and have absorbing careers and strong friendships. They are sceptical about love, and *Harpers & Queen* calls them the "Lone Rangers." But might there be unforeseen consequences to this new-found freedom?

Dr Catherine Hakim, a sociologist at the London School of Economics, describes them as "incremental decision makers", women who are constantly reconsidering their options and making their career the priority for another year. "They are constantly postponing, which after a certain passage of time becomes a permanent postponing," she says.

Just how much successful high-flying Nineties women are prepared to sacrifice was made apparent recently by Rebekah Wade when she was appointed deputy editor of the *Sun* newspaper at 29. "I think I need to be single for the job," she said, on taking up her post. Not so long before that she had called off her engagement to *EastEnders* actor Ross Kemp. Now she has married her job. Would Piers Morgan, who was made a Murdoch editor at a similar young age, have made the same decision?

A similar trend in the television industry was highlighted by a 1994 survey of industry executives which found that 70 per cent of women in their thirties were childless, compared with 34 per cent of their male colleagues.

Ms Wade and her media colleagues are typical of a particular generation – the 20 per cent of women born since the 1960s who are expected to choose to remain childless. This is predicted to rise to 30 per cent by 2010. In Britain childlessness is highest among women who have most to gain from their careers. They have professional, managerial jobs which offer promotions and interesting work. It's not just the great pay," says Dr Hakim.

But when they reach the top of their ladder, by which time it may be too late to rethink their choices, how will they feel? If lucky they will think like Lisa Germon, 38, chief executive of Cable and Wireless Mobile, who says: "I opted out of the family life and have never regretted it."

Others believe that a career and relationships are incompatible. Nicola Foulston, 27, last year's Veuve Clicquot Businesswoman of the Year, admits that her regular 70-hour weeks were one key reason her marriage did not last longer. "I tried to find a compromise between my marriage and my business life, but it didn't work out."

Annabel Heseltine, 34, journalist and daughter of Michael Heseltine, the former deputy prime minister, is writing a book about thirtysomething single women – of which she is one. Ms Heseltine lives alone in a flat she owns, like an increasing number of women today.

At 24, Ms Heseltine announced she wanted to travel. "My mother said: 'Darling don't you want to get married?' I said: 'Well, yes, but I don't want to hang around and wait for it. It was a very clear decision and that's the philosophy I've followed throughout my life.' Ten years on, she is still single.

She notices how women, herself included, become more picky as about a partner as they get older. "You look at them a lot more closely," she said. "You're not mucking around anymore. You're not 22-years-old, saying: 'Isn't it fun.' You are not choosing to be single, but you are choosing to be choosy."

According to Angela Giveon, managing editor of *Executive Woman* magazine: "A lot of women are making the choice to be single because they realise they can't have it all," said Ms Giveon. "They've usually had a failed relationship – not necessarily marriage – when they make this decision. Something is thrown at them like: 'You think of your job more than me,' and they think like a man: 'Sod it, it's not worth the bother.'

But Ms Heseltine remains confused by the apparent priorities of thirtysomething women. She suspects that they are not "really happy". "There are a lot of women in their thirties who seem to be quite happy about throwing away their chance to reproduce, which is phenomenal. There's the selfish gene; is this the selfish generation? ... The reality is that we're put onto this Earth for one reason only and that is to have children. But to deny such a fundamental urge, I don't buy it."

So, we fight for the freedom, but do we really want it? To Ms Heseltine all that choice turns into a burden. "For a lot of women a career justifies being single. You've had this choice. You want to do these different things. You find yourself single and it's because you have a career."

She believes that, in reality, most of her peers will be married by 40. "It's just taking them a long time to work it out. They are doing the questioning which a previous generation would have done when their children had grown up before they are even married."

But even when the right man does comes along, it is not all done and dusted. "You don't want to have your back



Cristina Odone and Annabel Heseltine say not having children is not an option

Photograph: Emma Boam

against the wall in your mid-forties. In reality, it is six months to a year before you're married. Do you really want to get pregnant the second you're married? Then you need time to try. So you're talking three years. It could all go wrong. The relationship could break up; you may not be able to have children that easily."

Cristina Odone, 37, author and television critic, would like to have children, but does not regret for a minute the choices she has made to date. Unlike Ms Heseltine, she regards careers as assisting women in fulfilling themselves. "I know I would be just as unhappy were I to jettison my writing as to wake up one day and

realise I missed the boat as regards childbirth," she says.

However, one incident – "a real eye-opener" – has stuck in Ms Odone's mind. "I went for professional advice to a woman who is a literary lioness," she recalls. "I was writing my first novel. She just looked at me and said: 'Just make sure that you don't pass up the chance of having a child. It's my one regret.' It was incredibly poignant and it really did alarm me."

"Some of the most interesting and accomplished women of my age who have foregone the baby option have all regretted it, without one exception. Really, relatively famous household names. They are all

self-styled feminists, self-styled career women, and are all hailed as success stories. Yet, they're all said in private: 'There's one thing I regret...'"

Between the age of 30 and 34, Ms Odone edited the *Catholic Herald* newspaper; she made a conscious decision not to settle down and have children at that time. "I was so wrapped up in work. I would have either resented the child or cheated on the work. I didn't want to do either. I don't regret that because I still feel I could have children. It's too early to regret. Now I think I could definitely balance work, which is writing at home, with a child. But hey, where's the husband?"



Singular success: David Geffen

A little of a good thing can be wonderful. Can't it?

Nobody knows if wine is bad for you, it seems. That's just as well because we're drinking more of it than ever. Kate Watson-Smyth sips the facts

IT'S SATURDAY – the morning after the night before. So how much did you drink last night? A couple of glasses of wine in the interests of preventing heart disease, or more than half a bottle which, if you are a woman, dramatically increases the risk of cancer. Or were you so confused by the conflicting messages that you drank several bottles to help you forget about the whole thing?

Research published this week purports to show that two or three glasses of wine a day can significantly reduce the risk of cancer. Strange that. A similar study put out earlier in the week carried the message that women who drink between two and five glasses a day will increase the risk of breast cancer.

It doesn't take a scientist to deduce that the advice has never been more contradictory, but despite that, the British are



or to try and create a new market. They went for the latter and have made a market out of nothing. There is a much greater choice of wine in this country than anywhere else in the world because we do not have a mature wine industry and so the market has exploded."

Wine sellers in places like Uruguay were faced with two choices – either to try and persuade the great aunt to give up her pink gin in favour of wine,

Further testament to our growing taste for wine is tak-

ing shape beneath the Cannon Street railway viaduct on the south bank of the Thames. By this time next year, the vast expanse of vaulted arches will be transformed into Vinopolis, a "City of Wine", no less.

The focal point of Vinopolis will be an "interactive" tour through 20 themed pavilions covering the main wine pro-

ducing regions of the world. A trip round the Italian section, for example, will allow visitors to take simulated tours of Italy's wine country while sitting on a Vespa.

Tony Hodges, director of WineWorld, who came up with the plan for Vinopolis and leased the 100,000-sq-ft space from Railtrack, says one rea-

son that wine has become so popular is that people are better educated and more widely travelled.

"Historically, wine was an aspirational drink for the gentry and the City but because of its availability in supermarkets, everyone drinks it now," he says. "People travel more and they want to try the wines

that they have seen abroad."

The retailers have been quick to cash in on the growing taste for wine. Specialist off-licences, Victoria Wine and Thresher for example, each have around 1,500 stores across the country. But the real story has been the rise of the supermarket.

Safeway, which stocks more than 500 wines, says that at the moment seven out of every 10 bottles are sold in a supermarket, compared with fewer than four just a decade ago. According to a spokeswoman for the store: "Palates are becoming much more sophisticated and drinking as an everyday habit has become much more acceptable."

But what are we to make of the health risks, particularly for those who are indulging in a glass or three every day?

Caroline Stacey, the food editor of *Time Out* magazine, says she distrusts much of the research. "It seems to me that scientists come out with a different message every day and you never quite know how reliable their studies are. I really don't think people should take that much notice. I drank wine in moderation all through

my pregnancy and I think that science is just used as a way of justifying puritanism."

Jason Rabinowitz, a research manager at the Design Council and lover of fine wines, is similarly dismissive of the health warnings. "If I read something that says wine is good for me then I will take notice of that but if I see an article saying it's bad then I tend to ignore it," he says.

Richard Doll, a leading consultant at the Cancer Studies Unit for the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and Britain's most famous medical researcher, has concluded that alcohol in moderation is good for you. "I can see no reason whatsoever for thinking that wine drinking would reduce the risk of cancer," he says.

The benefit of alcohol is in the prevention of heart disease, but that is only for those over the age of 45. However, it is quite clear that there is an overall benefit in moderate consumption and two drinks a day are good for you."

So with that cheerful thought in mind, perhaps it's time to nip down to the pub for a lunch-time glass – strictly medicinal of course.



More Titipu than Nagasaki: Liping Zhang as Butterfly, Craig Downes as Pinkerton

Photograph: Laurie Lewis

It's a well-known factoid (looks like a fact, smells like a fact, isn't it) that people are resistant to change - a line wheeled out regularly by the BBC when announcing schedule changes. Of course, if resistance to change were so firmly rooted in human nature, then we'd still be hanging around the Olduvai Gorge snarling at this trendy stone-tool rubbish and pining for the good old days, when people lived in trees and kids showed some respect.

But if small-c conservatism isn't necessarily part of the human condition, it may well be part of our condition, here and now.

It could be a global change, a reaction to the century that invented the phrase "I can remember when it was all trees round here"; or perhaps it's a purely local phenomenon, a reaction not to change pure and simple, but to injudicious, cocked-up change.

At any rate, this is the lesson you could draw from two programmes on Radio 4 this week. In *Why Did We Do That?* on Thursday, Chris Bowlby investigated the mania for urban motorways that laid waste so many towns and cities in the Sixties and Seventies; and on Friday morning the architect Maxwell Hutchinson began a six-

part series, *Back to the Drawing Board*, on the impact his profession has had on Britain over the past 50 years.

One thing both programmes made clear was that change was welcomed enthusiastically by many people - his companies ran tourist trips to admire the Presto bypass. And the demolition of slums in favour of clean, modern council estates was not

For his new 'Butterfly', David Freeman has flooded the Albert Hall but failed to tap the wellsprings of emotion. Edward Seckerson could have wept at the waste.

Water, water, everywhere... The advance publicity promised it, and Raymond Gubbay duly delivered it - all 15,000 gallons of it - to the Royal Albert Hall arena. There hasn't been this much fun about flooding in the capital since before the advent of the Thames barrier. But there it was, pretty as a picture postcard, a package holiday brochure, the way the West will always see it, the way Lieutenant BF Pinkerton saw it - one small corner of the "floating island" that is for ever Uncle Sam. Director David Freeman and his designer David Roger have plucked their *Madam Butterfly* straight from the Hollywood back-lot. It has the look, the feel, the rosy glow of a studio set from the days when Technicolor was still a novelty. You half expect the spirit of Esther Williams to surface from amidst the ornamental rocks and walkways and smile benevolently upon the whole enterprise.

But that, presumably, was the point: to isolate, to maroon Butterfly somewhere between her own culture and the West's perception of it. So the detail is lovingly precise, the kimonos enchanting, the blossom fresh every day. But we're closer to Gilbert & Sullivan's *Titipu* than to real-life Nagasaki. So this is a sham, an illusion, a fantasy - like Pinkerton's love for Butterfly. So David Freeman has something devastating up his sleeve for Act 2? Or not?

Returning after the interval, a time-lapse of three long years during which time Butterfly's hopes and finances have begun to dry up, we discover that - surprise, surprise - the water has, too. The water garden has become a Zen Buddhist stone garden, its austerity - or so the programme note insists

- a stern reminder of the religion which Butterly abandoned but which will now reclaim her. A stern reminder? But nothing else has changed. Butterfly's little house is still pretty as a picture, still festooned in fresh blossom, still bathed in that rosy glow (courtesy of lighting designer Andrew Bridge).

Nor has the attitude of the production changed. A change of tone, a sharper sense of reality - less artificial, less prissily "operatic" in its conceits - could suddenly have turned the evening on its head and delivered the body blow that some of us were convinced was only a scene-change away. Was this really the work of the same David Freeman whose innovative *Opera Factory* took opera out of the closet and showed it (and the operatic establishment) real life? Or did some clause in his contract preclude telling it like it really is?

All right, to be fair, it's a perfectly serviceable, if ultimately rather bland and somewhat "distanted" realisation of the opera. It understands its space and moves efficiently within it, wisely radiating as little as possible from the central focus of Butterfly's "floating world". When it does so - as in the pointlessly circling of the arena that so fatally disturbs the still centre of the love duet - it flounders. But the set-pieces function well enough. Butterfly's entrance duly works its picturesque charm, though some confusion might arise from the fact that her relations arrive at roughly the same time as the first batch of late-comers. There are a lot of them, of course (relations, that is), and Freeman has them dutifully assemble for the wedding photo - a nice touch, that, right down to the ripple of disquiet over the powder-flash. Would that there had been more where that kind of detail came from. All credit to Freeman, though, for getting the child, Sorrow, so right. The little sailor suit was a chilling touch, the golden hair (for this was indeed a miniature Pinkerton) hidden from view until Butterfly removes his hat proudly to display it. In the final scene, Sorrow is draped in the American flag to shield his eyes from his mother's honourable discharge. The final ignominy.

Now, if the cast had all sounded as good as they looked, the evening might yet have caught our emotions off guard. Craig

Downes was a franky second-rate Pinkerton, easier in manner than voice, and quite without that ability to open up and sustain confidently, suavely, at the top. Whatever else Pinkerton does or doesn't have, a ringing top register is a prerequisite. Keith Latham's Sharpless was good, though, an ample, bluff, suitably weathered vocal colour (better with the words than most), and Marcia Belafonte, while not exactly a scene-stealing Suzuki, found the humanity wherever she could. So did Liping Zhang's touching Butterfly. This promising young Chinese soprano is central casting's answer to the role, a pretty and wholly believable figure with plenty of voice (though "sound enhancement" - otherwise known as radio-miking - makes it hard to tell just how much) and the heart to make it count. Her problems (and I'm presuming that the odd lapse in intonation - despite hearing impairment in this difficult, far-flung space) have more to do with technique than spirit. A good performance could yet become an excellent one if her instinct could be matched with her ability to fine-tune and support phrasing beyond the point where rapture and pathos really begin. Even so, the passion, the resolve of her top notes, the inwardness and concentration of stage presence were not to be taken lightly. Alas, Amanda Holden's brand-new English translation was not money well-spent where she was concerned.

The sound of Gubbay's "opera for the people" is improving all the time, though the people should be advised that there is no substitute for the unvarnished, unamplified truth - particularly where operatic voices are concerned. Sound designer Bobby Aitken did a good job here on the BBC Concert Orchestra under Peter Robinson, extending the reach, beefing up the oompah to Dolby Stereo levels without it sounding so. In fact, this was easily the best of Gubbay's operatic ventures to date, even if one did still leave with the distinct feeling that David Freeman had been neutered.

To Sunday 1 March, Royal Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, London SW7. Booking: 0171-589 8212

THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

the imposition of a socialist utopia. Young architects often had an idealistic streak - dreams of building Le Corbusier's Radiant City - but they had a counter-balancing realism: as Hutchinson put it, you might have Veronica Lake pinned to your drawing-board, but you still loved your wife. Sadly, they were building in a hurry, with little firm knowledge of how modern materials

would behave over time, or how people would react to new living arrangements, such as high-rise blocks.

Bowlby's diagnosis of the trouble with road-building was less sympathetic, perhaps because it isn't his profession, perhaps because town-planners had fewer excuses. Certainly it's hard to see the counter-balancing realism in Birmingham's dream that "tree-lined parkways" would help transform it into one of Europe's most beautiful cities. Luckily, the wave of urban road-building broke against London, the planners admitting defeat when computer projec-

tions of traffic flow suggested that Earls Court be replaced by a 14-lane motorway.

These sharply argued, well-made programmes offered nicely contrasted views of closely related subjects. This was probably mere accident, though, and could easily have been another example of the BBC failing to find new ideas, or remember the old ones. This week had a good example: a Radio 3 series on spa-towns called *Taking the Waters*, admirably complementing last year's Radio 2 feature on the same subject with the same title. And you thought the BBC was interested in novelty for its own sake.

Yes we have no arts policy

A WEEK IN THE ARTS DAVID LISTER

One of the most significant events in the arts this week went completely unpublicised, unreported and unheard. Actually, that's not quite fair. A room full of people did hear this talk on the future of arts policy in England: but they heard it in Scotland, where it will not apply, so they don't fully count.

The talk was given by Graham Devlin, his inaugural lecture as honorary professor of the Scottish Centre for Cultural Policy and Management at Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh. Mr Devlin is deputy general secretary of the Arts Council of England, and for nearly a year has been acting secretary-general - in other words, running the show. So his words repay some study. I was, of course, happy to hear him using some of his inaugural lecture to endorse *The Independent's* campaign for tax breaks for people who give to the arts. Let's hope that Edinburgh University alumnus Gordon Brown pays attention to honorary professors in the city.

I also enjoyed the diversion of his reminiscences about the Arts Council's more controversial funding decisions. Who would want to forget the legendary two men walking round East Anglia with poles on their heads (funded by the Experimental Projects Committee)? Who would want to remember Throbbing Gristle's exhibition of Miss Cosie Fanny Tutti's soiled underwear at the ICA?

But Mr Devlin's talk was of



such disclaimers. I'm content to believe that the man who has administered the Arts Council for the past year, and actually continues to do so for another month, is projecting more than a few personal whims. What we got in that Edinburgh lecture theatre was a snapshot of how the arts will be run in the future.

The new Council, says Mr Devlin, should be slimmed

down and should give more thought to funding individuals as well as companies and buildings. And about time too. The premise that we cannot fund individuals has led to some ludicrous anomalies over the years. We managed to lose a talent like the director

Well, one could argue that it should have been doing most of this already. But let's not be picky. This future role as a policy body, with the regions distributing funds locally, makes some sense, and might save the Council from abolition by an increasingly sceptical government. The successes of Adventures in Motion Pictures and others in the West End show that the subsidised and commercial sectors are closely linked. And the public never differentiates between them anyway. A national cultural strategy should embrace both.

Most pleasing was a sentence in Devlin's speech which said that the Council should put subsidy into seat-pricing structures which "make the arts affordable for the majority of people, and not just a well-heeled élite". At last, a glimmer of recognition that price determines access, and that the best thing a subsidy body can do is to bring down ticket prices. The effect could not be better illustrated than by the sell-out success of Raymond Gubbay's cut-price but stunning *Madam Butterfly* now playing at the Royal Albert Hall (and reviewed above). Bringing ticket prices down, making transport to arts events safer and more efficient: these are things rarely discussed by funding bodies. But they are crucial to bringing in more punters.

Peter Brook to France, presumably because he was not a building.

Devlin goes on to say that the new slimmed-down Council should be responsible for the overall distribution of funding for the arts (although not necessarily doing much itself in the way of individual grant-giving) and for undertaking research and devising arts policy that encompasses

Our expedition cruise aboard the ideally suited 'Professor Multanovsky' will take us from Aberdeen to Oban on an island odyssey to inaccessible places of great natural beauty, rich wildlife and mystical history. With just 40 or so like-minded souls we will sail to seldom visited islands on the fringes of the Orkney and Shetland groups - Copinsay, Fair Isle, Mouse, the Oui Skerries and Foula and then head for the Hebrides and such gems as the World Heritage Site of St Kilda, North Rona and Canna.

This unique voyage will appeal to those who wish to visit some of the remotest islands of the kingdom and see some of its extraordinary, prolific seabird life. Explore the shores for grey and common seals and the cliffs for puffins and gannets, walk amongst the ruins of past habitation and enjoy the peace and spectacular scenery which has changed little in centuries.

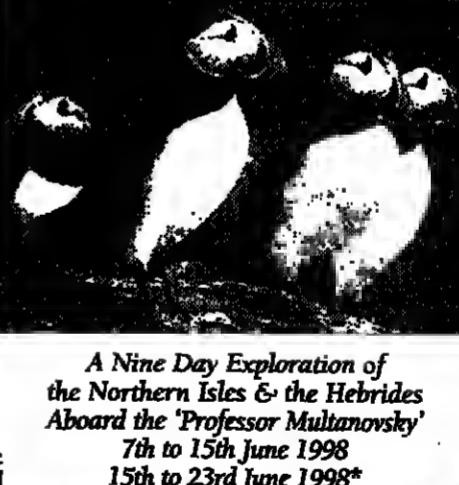
THE PROFESSOR MULTANOVSKY
Built in Finland for the former Soviet Union's programme of polar and oceanographic research, she has been refurbished for expedition travel. The Multanovsky is a comfortable and well equipped vessel, accommodating a maximum of 48 passengers.

All passenger accommodation has outside views and you can choose between a two berth cabin with shower and toilet or a two bedded cabin with shared facilities.

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Looking after the day to day programme on board will be the expedition leader and the team. There will be no formal entertainment, but the expedition team will organise briefings and illustrated talks. For our forays ashore we will use the vessel's Zodiac craft allowing us great flexibility.

ISLANDS ON THE EDGE



A Nine Day Exploration of the Northern Isles & the Hebrides Aboard the 'Professor Multanovsky'

7th to 15th June 1998

15th to 23rd June 1998*

* Sails in reverse order from Oban to Aberdeen

THE ITINERARY

We expect to explore and land on a number of remote islands, taking advantage of weather conditions to use our time to maximum effect. We hope to achieve the following:

Aberdeen. Embark 'Prof. Multanovsky' in the afternoon and sail. The expedition leader will introduce the team and outline the sailing plan.

Copinsay. To the east of Orkney and Scapa Flow are the tiny islands of Copinsay, cruise the mile-long cliffs with their spectacular birdlife.

Fair Isle. Lying claim to be the most isolated inhabited isle in the UK. Here we can stretch our legs on an island walk, perhaps visiting the Bird Observatory and searching out the puffin slopes. The tiny population of 50 or so islanders always extend a warm welcome.

Mousa. South of Lerwick is the

uninhabited island of Mousa. Hopefully, we should see basking common and grey seals and others. Here we will also see one of the best examples of a Broch (Iron Age fort).

Foula. South west of Shetland lies Foula, home to thousands of auks, guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes, breeding on a breathtakingly high cliff, known as the Noup. In the island's ponds we will look for red-necked phalaropes and red-throated divers. The colonies of Arctic skuas and great skuas are amongst the largest in the North Atlantic. North Rona. Our first landfall in the Hebrides will be the lovely, lonely island of North Rona. Here we may find leach's petrels nesting and nearby colonies of great black-backed gulls, great skuas and puffins. This is also a breeding ground for grey seals. In the evening we circumnavigate Sula Sgeir with its thousands of gannets.

St Kilda. Remote and spectacular, the St Kilda archipelago is home to vast numbers of seabirds. Weather permitting we will go ashore by Zodiac to Hirta, where the village which was deserted by the islanders in 1930 is now being restored by the National Trust for Scotland.

Circumnavigate Boreray and the stacks.

Canna. Here, on this National Trust for Scotland property, we will enjoy coastal walks, looking for shorebirds, golden and white-tailed eagles and peregrine falcons. Oban. Arrive in the morning and disembark after breakfast.

Prices range from £995 per person sharing a three bedded cabin (with shared facilities) to £1795 per person in a suite. Single cabins from £1695.

* Sails in reverse order from Oban to Aberdeen

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Let's be allowed to tune in to what really turns us on.



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Mmm, what's up, Doc? What is up, you long-eared pyjama sack, is that some of us Europeans have had enough of your homogenised American culture infiltrating our precious heritage and want to put a stop to it? As we report today, the Netherlands government wants to impose a quota on concerts, reserving 7 per cent of performing time for the work of Dutch composers.

This is only the latest instance in a long tradition of cultural protectionism, much of which is primarily a reaction against American dominance. Cultural protectionism is particularly strong in Canada, a country with a national psyche largely defined by its relationship with its massive, and massively vulgar, neighbour. It has controls on magazine publishing and quotas for popular music on the radio as well as pop videos on television. The purpose is not explicitly to build a dyke against a tide of American pap, but to foster "world-beating talent" of Canada's own. As if Neil Young and the Cowboy Junkies needed subsidy to succeed (and as if not who the Cowboy Junkies might be: Sir Jerrim Harman, the "out-of-touch judge", has just been sacked for less).

On the other side of the Atlantic, France has been the most enthusiastic builder of ramparts to preserve its own cul-

tural purity. It was France which led the failed initiative to require half of all television broadcasting in the European Union to be European-made. It was France which took the global free-trade negotiations, Gatt, to the brink because it insisted on – and eventually obtained – special treatment for its film and television industries.

And it is France which is now leading the charge against the attempt to liberalise cross-border investment in the 29 rich countries in the OECD club. Earlier this week, French film-makers demonstrated in Paris in support of the minister of culture, who is resisting a ban on discrimination against foreign investors. This would outlaw French attempts to protect their own film industry, and amounts to an American attack on French "cultural identity", according to Jean-Jacques Beineix, director of *Betty Blue*.

It is easy for us to sneer at French defensiveness. We like to think France is funny, and to adopt an air of superiority about the ability of English to absorb words from French – and many other languages. But we speak a dialect of American, after all, and can share much more easily both in Disney fantasy and in Hollywood drama without being constantly aware that it is foreign. Despite our knee-jerk anti-



Americanism, we consume American culture avidly, and our lives have been greatly enriched by it. Continental Europeans are mocked by history, too, in that the creative spark of the California film industry was exported from Europe, largely by Russian Jewish émigrés.

But language, the substructure of

culture, is a sensitive subject. French, once the *lingua franca* of an empire, now cringes before the global pervasiveness of polyglot English. The Dutch – the very name by which they are known to us marginalises them as an adjunct of die Deutschen – speak a frail and pasteurised German, in both of which they are often also fluent.

The United Kingdom has long accepted that special measures of legal protection and taxpayer subsidy are justified for a language such as Welsh. But it is a long step from preserving and promoting a language to drawing up quotas for cultural products. And this is where we must take issue with the Dutch government's decree.

However much our knees might jerk in sympathy with the protection of national cultural autonomy, this kind of crude quota must be rejected. It is as doomed in the international trading of widgets. Cultural quotas open the authorities to ridicule and their effects will be counter-productive. Already opponents claim that the fact that composers can be considered "Dutch" if they have made a "long-term and significant contribution to Dutch music" could let in Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler. Getting around the 3 per cent

quota reserved for living Dutch composers – those who have not yet popped their clogs – is a tougher assignment. Theo Verhey is the name cited by the Dutch Composers' Society in defence of the quota system: newcomers like him "need the opportunity to have their work heard". Perhaps, but do concert-goers need the opportunity to be forced to hear it? Such a requirement would lead to riots in the stalls in this country, being interpreted as an edict for the compulsory playing of Harrison Birtwhistle.

Quotas are bound to be abused. Apparently Marcel Poot, a Belgian composer, owes his fame to the fact that he once composed a piece which is just five minutes long – popular with Belgian orchestras entitled to extra state funding if they play a Belgian composition on foreign tours.

We are not opposed to official support for all forms of art and culture – on the contrary, we are campaigning for the Government to do more. But we are against this kind of Protectionism. In a free society with (despite some imperfections in the markets for newspapers and satellite television) free media, people should be allowed to see, hear and buy whatever art turns them on, wherever it comes from.

LETTERS

Childcare tax breaks

THE Government makes much of its commitment to a national childcare strategy, but I fail to see how any system implemented can be fair and workable until it is focused on every working mother in this country, rather than just on those who are most needy or at the lowest end of the pay scale.

Labour's efforts to improve childcare provision as part of its New Deal programme are commendable. But the majority of mothers with children are not claiming benefit. Many millions of us have paid into the tax and benefits system for years, only to find that as soon as we decide to start a family, the doors of state support are closed to us.

How can a system which willingly taxes women when they are childless and commitment-free, but which refuses to give them anything in return when they are most in need of support, be a just one?

If this government is to retain the crucial support of female voters, it must look at ways of recognising the vast economic contribution made by working mothers, and examine workable incentives to those who wish to return to work after childbirth and continue contributing to the Treasury through the tax system. The Independent's suggestion of an £1,800 tax credit is an excellent start.

LJ WRIGHT
London N22

I AM delighted to see you have started a campaign to help working mothers like myself. I work as a researcher for an MP, and although I love my job, it is actually costing me money to work. Because I work long hours and my son is not yet at school, childcare absorbs all my after-tax income. A small amount of Family Credit is left to cover all my other living costs.

There are many people working in Parliament, who aren't MPs, who are likely to need workplace childcare (report, 19 February), and subsidised childcare at that. There are surveys sent out once in a while to try and determine the demand for a nursery in Parliament. So far they have demonstrated that there is not enough demand to justify a nursery. But surely that's because parents who would need it are not here to be surveyed – because they have difficulty arranging or affording childcare.

EMMA THORPE
Thames Ditton, Surrey

FAR from the sinister motives implied in not returning a call from Fran Ahrens to comment on a campaign for childcare in the House of Commons ("No room for children in the house", 19 February), may I say that I both support the campaign and returned her call.

I believe that affordable quality childcare is crucial in providing equal opportunities in the workplace and the House of Commons is no exception. Over 1500 staff work in and around the House of Commons and I hope that we can set an example to other employers by practising family friendly policies. I have given my full support to the



Bidding for the possessions of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor at Sotheby's in New York

Photograph: Reuters

End of a love story

THE sale in New York of the household and personal effects of the late Duke and Duchess of Windsor is a historic and poignantly sad occasion – it is the final chapter to the true love story of this century.

The Duke and Duchess were a couple who lived and

loved and faced their destiny, and I came to know them in France after they had lived many years in exile. In February 1972 the American Hospital of Paris where I was nursing at the time, asked me to take special charge of the Duke of Windsor after his exploratory operation.

The Duchess was severely

criticised, but in my view it was a relationship which started out as an innocent interest on her part, then through genuine love developed with landslide speed into a major monarchy crisis.

I know the world, and history, have judged the Duke of Windsor and found him wanting as a public figure; but I knew him as a private man. I came to

see that his courage in illness was as staunch as his courage in love. He was generous and never complained of the pain of illness or the pain of exile.

The depth of the Duchess's love was enduring. When I arrived at their home in the Bois de Boulogne to nurse him there after his release from hospital the Duchess gave me a gift, a

brooch of the smallest carnation in the world designed by the Duke and made by Cartier "to thank me for bringing the Duke safely home".

Now with no earthly collection of possessions left we must pray they are both safely home.

OONAGH SHANLEY-TOFFOLO
London SW5

Established by God

DESPITE what Paul Valéry writes ("Established values", 19 February), the issue of the establishment, or possible disestablishment, of the Church of England, is not one which exercises the minds of clergy or laymen a great deal: it is sometimes a nuisance, but otherwise all but irrelevant. The state regards us as established when it is convenient for it to do so, but when it comes to the paying of VAT we are a private organisation.

I do what I do because I am a priest of a Christian church. My local church does what it does because it is part of the worldwide church, not because of any national link with the state. And we do what we do in collaboration, not competition, with the other churches in the area.

My job is to attempt to be a pastor to anyone, good, bad or indifferent, living in my parish;

the job of my church is to open its doors and be available to them, come what may. We don't need to be established by the state to do that: our establishment is older than England itself.

JOHN WILLIAMS
Rector of West Wittering and Birdham with Itchenor
West Wittering, West Sussex

strength of being highly visible, national organisations which can offer a great deal to their donors in the form of kudos. Many less well-resourced companies might soon find themselves face down in the malmsey.

Smaller organisations cannot compete in terms of raising the open wallets of the wealthy. Their clients might be the young, the unemployed, the disabled. They may operate on a local level, so that much of their work is unseen. Or they may produce experimental work. All useful, necessary and potentially of very high quality, but just not "sexy" enough to attract private giving. They would consider life without public subsidy as being very unfair indeed.

ROD BIRTLES
General Manager
Milton Keynes City Orchestra

Jobs for the bands

AS someone who has worked as a roadie and a tour manager, I find the views expressed by Alan McGee, the director of Creation Records, totally wrong (report, 18 February).

The musicians who are most productive are engaged in some sort of employment. They can relate to everyday life and also afford to tour. They are able to spend more money on decent rehearsal facilities and a recording studio, and on professional advice and equipment.

A look at any listings magazine will show how many bands are trying to "make it" at any given time. Very few will make it to become household names. Why doesn't the Government bring in a loan system, as they have for students, so that musicians may return the money paid to support them, when they become rich?

C R D HAYES
London N2

Paying for the arts

ANDREAS Whittem Smith's argument that "the best way to save the arts is to remove the single payer" (17 February) paters over a number of cracks.

He is incorrect to suggest that most arts organisations rely overwhelmingly on a single funder. This is not the case for many organisations who already put together a patchwork of income from many sources, including the Arts Council or regional arts boards, local authorities, businesses, office and private giving. Whilst the loss of one of these sources would be damaging, it would not necessarily be fatal.

Second, he assumes that, having plotted its demise, a culture of philanthropy towards the arts would spring up to carry the coffin of the Arts Council. I suspect that he is too optimistic. Whilst a number of Britain's larger arts institutions have indeed tapped into private giving, they have the

strength of being highly visible, national organisations which can offer a great deal to their donors in the form of kudos. Many less well-resourced companies might soon find themselves face down in the malmsey.

Smaller organisations cannot compete in terms of raising the open wallets of the wealthy. Their clients might be the young, the unemployed, the disabled. They may operate on a local level, so that much of their work is unseen. Or they may produce experimental work. All useful, necessary and potentially of very high quality, but just not "sexy" enough to attract private giving. They would consider life without public subsidy as being very unfair indeed.

ROD BIRTLES
General Manager
Milton Keynes City Orchestra

Posse of preachers

GRAHAM DON suggests (letter, 19 February) a posse of missionaries be sent to Northern Ireland. The last thing Northern Ireland needs is more preachers. A posse to round up the existing ones seems a more attractive proposition.

HOWARD INGRAM
Belfast

QUOTE UNQUOTE

"If Mo Mowlam has a fault it is that she can sometimes come into a room without opening the door first" — Neil Kinnock, Euro-Commissioner

"I sat behind Brigitte Bardot once in a restaurant, but the lady friend I was with wouldn't let me turn round to look at her." — the Marquis of Bath

"Sweat is holy water, pearls of liquid that release your past, more you pray. The more you pray the closer you come to ecstasy" — Gabrielle Roth, guru of the "trance dance".

"Ah, so God finally caught his eye" — George S Kaufmann, American playwright, on being told that the imperious head waiter of one of his favourite restaurants had died.

"When I want an idea I have a bath, and it just comes. By the time I go into rehearsals I'm very clean" — Edward Hall, director of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

"I like to think of myself as an artist with a capital A" — Yoko Ono.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number.
Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk
E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address.
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

WE are being urged not to repeat the mistakes of history by

Media workers unite, you have nothing to lose but your anthrax



DAVID AARONOVITCH
SCRIBBLERS AGAINST THE GULF WAR

It is regrettable that this newspaper, unlike the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New Statesman*, failed to publish the recent stirring letter protesting against the forthcoming war against Iraq, and written by a collective called Media Workers Against The War. The signatories included two comedians, a novelist, two *Guardian* columnists, the editor of the *Modern Review* and Paul Foot. As an old left-winger myself I wish that they had asked me to sign it too. The name is a good one; anything with the word "Worker" in it still makes me feel agreeably militant. And "Comedians And Columnists Against The War" doesn't have quite the same associative force.

Pointing out that the last Gulf war "was not a war at all, but a slaughter", the Media Workers make an impassioned plea that we should not lend credence to "a ruthless second adventure that will solve nothing in the Gulf and end in another bloodbath".

This must be right. A proper war entails thousands of deaths on both sides. As a model one could take the Iran-Iraq conflict, in which the invasion of Iran led to a 10-year struggle in which millions were killed or wounded. Dreadful though it was, it was nonetheless a true meeting of equals, not the appalling lopsided duck-shoot that the Gulf war became.

And what did the latter achieve? Apart from the liberation of Kuwait (a mixed blessing if ever there was one, especially for the Filipino worker-slaves of the Kuwaiti oil-rich), absolutely nothing.

Which brings us to the present. Having supplied Saddam with many of the agents necessary for the manufacture of horrific weapons of mass destruction, we in the West now seem almost pedantically determined to prevent him from keeping them. While

the Media Workers and I support adherence to the United Nations Resoluting number whatever it was, any sensible person cannot help but feel that such a necessarily intrusive process will be bound to provoke resistance from the Iraqi authorities. These problems should be handled politely, not with the language of threat and war. Anyway, he didn't actually use all that nerve gas during the Gulf war, did he?

And yet, here we are, preparing to send the bombers over to kill the terrified women and children (and men) of Iraq, simply so that we can get our hands on a vial or two of anthrax which Saddam may very well never even use. And all this without the support of any of the governments in the region. Friends, how insane can we get?

Insane, I'm afraid. For, actually, things are even worse than the Media Workers have realised. Just this week, in Las Vegas, two US citizens, Larry Wayne Harris and William Leavitt, were surrounded in their Mercedes by armed representatives of the discredited federal government, forced out of the vehicle and imprisoned without trial.

Why? Because it was thought that they might be in possession of anthrax, botulinus toxin and ricin – some of the most deadly substances known to man. The US Army's Biohazard team moved in and took away 10 bags marked "biological", which is now being tested at an Air Force base in Nevada.

There are some very interesting parallels here between this case and that of Iraq: parallels that tell us much about how we are governed. In the first place, it is *not actually illegal* for US citizens to possess (for their own purposes) such toxins. Why then arrest these men? Second, it is certain that the anthrax and botulinus toxin were purchased in the US itself, so how about that for hypocrisy?

Now, it is true that one of the Las Vegas Two, Mr Harris, had a previous conviction for fraudulently obtaining bubonic plague culture. But this fact merely serves to emphasise that he hadn't actually used either the bubonic plague or the anthrax. Mr Harris may not be great guy, but that doesn't mean that you've got to jump him.

Next, in another echo of the propaganda onslaught against Iraq, it was suggested that Mr Harris and Mr Leavitt were planning an anthrax strike against the New York subway. This accusation has now been firmly denied by the mayor of New York. So can one escape the suspicion that this arrest coincides too neatly with the latest stage of the Lewinsky investigation?

Of course it is true that Mr Harris is a well-known neo-Nazi, a member of the Christian Identity Church, for which Jews are "Satan's children", blacks are "mud people" and which supports toppling the democratically elected American government by force. And it is also true that his associates are rich, well-armed and bonkers. Though it must be said at once that Mr Harris is, if anything, slightly less anti-Semitic than the Iraqi regime (with whom he has, in the past, had contact).

But there is no evidence that dealing with such people by force does any good. It is always the innocent who suffer, whether in Baghdad or Waco. So to that end I call upon my comrades in Media Workers Against The War to join my campaign, just as I endorse theirs. My slogan? Give the Nazis Back Their Anthrax.

Yes, they pull a few (apron) strings, but is that a crime?



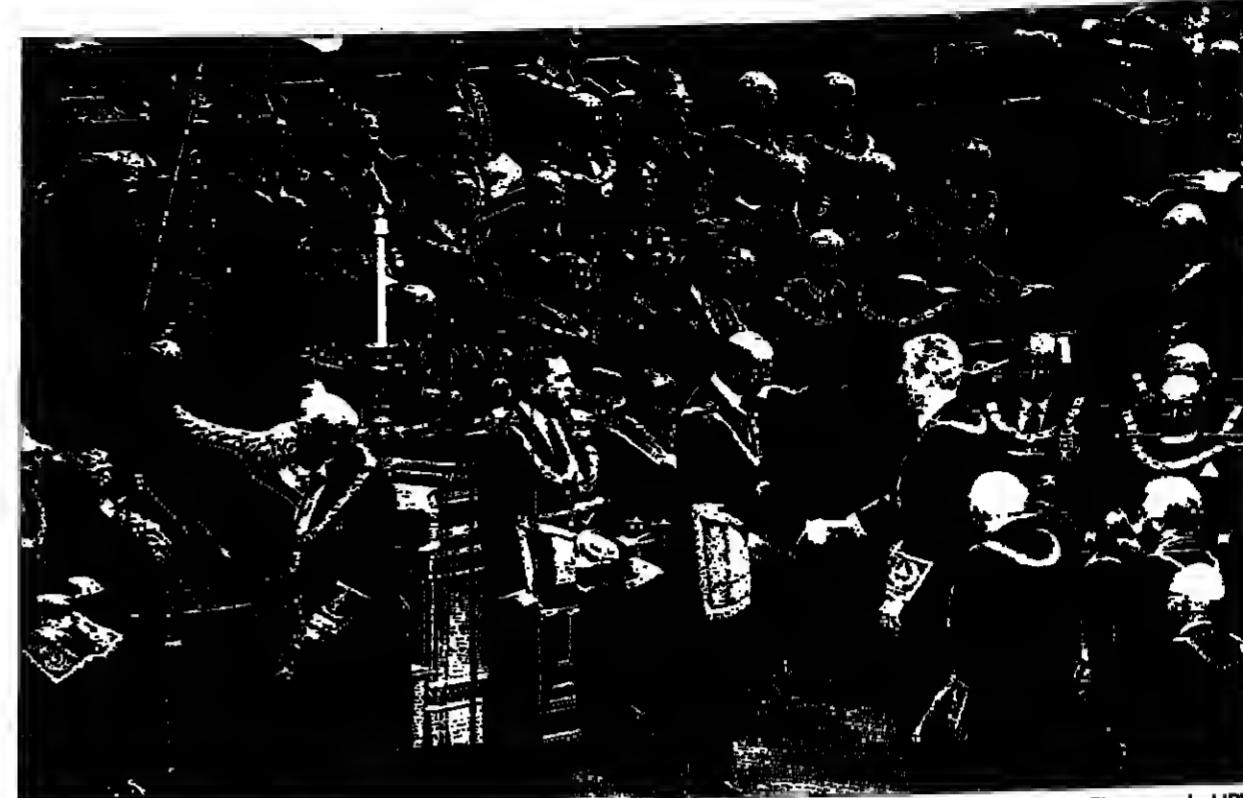
DAVID WALKER
IN DEFENCE OF FREEMASONRY

When Michael Higham, the Masonic bigwig, was being knocked about by MPs the other day he used a curious phrase. The Freemasons, he claimed, are a "freedom association". Masons? All that regalia, clandestine meetings, enigma wrapped in allegory, aprons, back-scratching and – without question – occasional dabbling in conspiracy to pervert the course of justice?

Yet he was right. Political freedom means that individuals there have to exist layered institutions allowing us room to manoeuvre without interference from above. Our brand of free-market capitalism only works because economic activity is embedded in a dense network of social norms and relationships of trust, which form around voluntary organisations. Freemasonry is such an institution and such a form of trust. No Freemasons, less freedom.

You don't have to tip your wig to Edmund Burke to see his "little platoons" do embed us in society and help protect against tyranny. (Conspiracy theory watch: Burke was also a paid-up Mason.) One of Thatcherism's greatest errors was her misunderstanding of the nature of markets, as if individuals were the be-all and end-all when in fact – as the Russians are painfully discovering – without a dense civil society, market economics slip into crime and corruption.

Think, this weekend, of the ties that bind ... the bowls clubs, boy scouts, the National Trust, Greenpeace, the United Reformed Church, Chelsea Foothall Club, the Attlee Memorial Runners ... and yes, the United Grand Lodge. None of them belongs to the state. Each is bigger than the individuals who form their members. Britain is thickly planted



Shake a leg: celebrations for the Grand Masonic Lodge's 275th anniversary

Photograph: UPP

with them; they are part of the national formula for political peace and social stability.

To call Chris Mullin, the Chairman of the Commons' Home Affairs Committee, a despot, would be silly. The balding, bespectacled Labour MP bashed his credentials as a civil libertarian by his tireless campaigning against state injustice on behalf of the Birmingham Six.

Yet he flirts with a dangerous attack not just on individual liberty – for why on earth should not grown men be allowed to join together for the purposes of rolling up their trouser legs if they so wish – but on the social foundations of liberty. A state which cannot tolerate, let alone protect, the privacy of its citizens, is a dangerous one indeed. Mr Mullin, on the left of the Labour Party, knows full well that the trade union movement only exists because the state deliberately decided to look inside its lodges and rituals.

So it wasn't just the nastiness of the hooliganism to which he and his colleagues subjected the Mason's chief executive (the MPs' credibility as earnest seekers after truth and justice would be a lot greater if they ever harried ministers in the same way). It was the disproportion in their response to allegations about Masonic involvement in conspiracy. So far, with them; they are part of the national formula for political peace and social stability.

Similarly in the courts. The problem is surely not that judges belong to a secret society but that the judiciary has, at least until recently, barely been managed and certainly not subjected to external scrutiny. You could add this to the charge sheet: if you appoint only men of a certain age, schooling and background to positions where their efficiency and effectiveness is never examined, is it really surprising they get away with ... murder?

Masonry has, evidently, not lived up to its own ideals. On its escutcheon the Grand

Lodge says firmly that "any attempt to use membership to promote business, professional or personal interests" is contrary to its ethic; officially, a Mason's prime duty is to the law of the land. Brother constable and Master judge have let the side down in a big way ... but then what organisation (churches included) ever lives up to its own ethical billing?

Masonry has always been a queer kind of secret society. Walk down the main street in Laurencekirk, and the most imposing building – it challenges the Church of Scotland for size – is the Lodge. In Scotland, Masonry really does like golf, belong to the people, or at least those involved in the building trade and medium-sized commerce. Step forward Brother Robbie Burns.

English Masonry, like most things English, is snootier. The Grand Lodge's web site (well: it was inevitable they would have one) lists among former grandees admirals, field marshals and bishops. But just because the Duke of Keot is Grand Master does not mean every fantasist's dream about Jack the Ripper being a royal deviant is true. Freemasons' lodges are only one among many forms of association. I confess that I belong to what used to be called a gentleman's club, with an imposing portico on Pall Mall – but it

does not make me either a gentleman or a potential conspirator against justice and good procedure.

Is Masonry really so tainted that Jack Straw is justified in forcing police officers and judges to declare membership as a condition of entry to the job ... and if Masonry why not also membership of the MCC, the Roman Catholic Church, the Tory Party? How many private dining societies does the House of Commons support?

To call this government's thinking about privacy incoherent is an understatement.

When Masons, rather wistfully, try to remind everyone that in the past they have been less wedded to the established order, they do have a point. After all Brother Wolfgang had a liberal, anti-authoritarian sensibility.

History will not save them but sociology ought to. The Grand Lodge should purchase for its library several copies of the books by (New Labour friendly) Robert Putnam on civil society in Italy and the United States along with a shelf of recent Demon pamphlets, especially those written by Geoff Mulgan, now resident at Number 10. All that stuff about networks, connectivity and trust ... that is exactly what aprons, bare breasts, daggers and passwords are all about.

Draw a lace veil over the Lord Chancellor



ANTHONY SCRIVENER
DERRY IRVINE'S NEW CURTAINS

It is time people started to think about the Lord Chancellor's human rights – like everyone else he is entitled to a right or two. It really is too bad everyone giving him stick over a scrap of wallpaper and some alleged curtains. I have to say "alleged" because the curtains – allegedly – are covered by the Official Secrets Act and I do not want to end up in the Tower, not unless of course the Lord Chancellor is going to furnish my cell.

It's too much. Being accused of profligacy is a serious matter for a Scotsman, almost as bad as being called generous. As for looting his homeland's art treasures ... just because he is borrowing a skip or two of pictures to deaden the impact of all that lace.

The cancellarial apartment in the House of Lords overlooks the River Thames and it goes with m'lud's job. Some people get a Rover and some people get luncheon vouchers ... the Lord Chancellor gets robes, black stockings, the right to sit on a sack of wool and an apartment.

So there you are with this apartment some 50ft above the ground and you obviously need curtains. Admittedly it's not quite like the housing estate where one spent one's childhood in abject poverty and where the neighbours and others could look in and see you changing your socks. But there is a risk of being seen by

helicopters and people in airliners on the flight path to Heathrow with binoculars or a telescope and a yen to have a quick peer. So obviously you need curtains for a bit of privacy. A Lord Chancellor has to take off and put on his trousers all through the day because he has to dress up for the House of Lords.

So there is this great need for curtains. But, you can hardly expect the Lord Chancellor to go for the suburban lace variety from John Lewis (never

comfortable if one suspected that the Lord Chancellor did not have a bit of privacy for all the dressing and undressing he has to do? The fact that a bit of decent material is needed – not some cheap smut from Petticoat Lane.

It is the same with the wallpaper. You can hardly stick up Laura Ashley on bits of national heritage – you don't see that at Windsor Castle or even the Palace. Although flock wallpaper sends out the right ethnic message we could not

Chancellor to wake up in the morning surrounded by 15ft high curtains with pulls and gold knobs on and Grecian urn type wallpaper, in a convertible sofa bed from a mail order catalogue? No, no. In these surroundings you need something grand and celestial: something you can ascend into at night and descend from in the morning.

It is not fair to compare the cost of all this with the cost of providing legal aid certificates. People who want legal

have such trouble when he was doing up Hampton Court.

The Lord Chancellor is entitled to privacy like everyone else – see Clause Eight of the European Convention on Human Rights. The amount people spend on curtains or wallpaper or even cushioning is a matter for privacy. Who knows how much William and Ffion spent on their curtains?

These are all private matters and they should be sensibly tucked away in the accounts as immaterial items under the heading of sundries or something like that. An Englishman's home is his castle and a Scotsman's apartment.

It was to be hoped that the Human Rights Bill would ensure privacy with respect to the cost of a person's curtains and wallpaper. Sadly this may not be so. In such circumstances the use of the Official Secrets Act is an obvious choice. You never know what devices could be attached to the folds of expensive curtain material. There is an obvious security risk. The history of espionage is full of examples of secret policemen and security operatives stuffing microphones behind wallpaper.

You, private citizens, would not like to read about the cost of your curtains and wallpaper on the front page of a daily newspaper, would you? Let us lend our support, then, to the rights of my Lord Chancellor.

Anthony Scrivener QC is a former chairman of the Bar.

"Wouldn't it be uncomfortable knowing the Lord Chancellor did not have a bit of privacy for all the undressing he has to do. A bit of decent material is needed – and not some cheap smut from Petticoat Lane"

knowingly undersold). Bearing in mind the size of the windows you would need sheets of the stuff and even if you crinkle them up and sew in a bow or two you are still talking about a lot of lace.

Then, of course, there is the heritage point. The Lord Chancellor's apartment is part of our National Heritage. If you are going to be made into a judge or if you are a judge who is going to be rebuked you will be invited to this gracious apartment and there you will have an opportunity of savouring part of our patrimony. Wouldn't it be un-

aid do not have the responsibility of looking after a bit of the National Heritage: all they are doing is embarking on for a thousand rolls or so of the hand-engraved stuff.

This has to be a good use of public money. What people do not realise is that with this quality of merchandise you do not leave the leftovers in the garage – this is stuff you could sell to some Eastern potentate or the French to paste up in Versailles.

And now if that is not enough there is all this fuss about having a Ritz bed. Do we really expect the Lord

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Molly Cusack Smith

MOLLY CUSACK SMITH was for several decades living proof that the world of Somerville and Ross was not yet dead in Ireland. Amid the "hard-riding country gentlemen" and to the echo of "porter-drinker's randy laughter", she epitomised Yeats's "indomitable Irish". Whatever the poet of order and high courtesy might have made of her legendary abrasiveness, he would certainly have been immensely proud of her unassailable spirit.

Although she had been a successful couturier in London during the Second World War, it was as a horsewoman that Molly Cusack Smith was best known and admired. She was joint-master of the North Galway hunt for 38 years, from 1946 until she retired in 1984. She remained honorary master for the rest of her life.

Her fine horsemanship combined with a natural flamboyance made her a national figure in the drab Ireland of the 1940s. She nearly always stole the limelight at the Dublin Horse Show, and usually drew a standing ovation as she led the Galway Blazers into the ring at the Royal Dublin Society.

She hated the term "Anglo-Irish" and never tired of pointing out that while she might have married into that particular strata of society, she came from one of the great Irish families – the O'Rorke of Bruff. And besides, she insisted, she could swear as fluently in Gaelic as in English.

She was born in Dublin in 1905. Her father, Charles Treoch O'Rorke, owned a pack of harriers and hunted and farmed the wild and bare countryside of North Galway. The O'Rorke were one of many great Irish families who for

centuries paid obedience to the Anglo-Norman monarchs largely in order to safeguard their succession rights, which was not possible under the Irish clan system.

A precocious only child, Molly was educated in England and France and started hunting with her father's pack when she was ten. But after a disagreement with him over horses, she left for Paris. She started to study music but diverted to dress designing and in London established herself as a successful couturier, specialising in evening dresses. In later years she always designed her own hunting outfits.

During the Paris years she became an accomplished cook, moved in artistic circles and had her portrait done by Augustus John. She met her future husband, Sir Dermot Cusack Smith, at a wartime cocktail party in London. They wed in 1940 but the marriage soon failed and Sir Dermot died while the divorce was going through. In a 1992 interview she said the match was a very suitable one. "He was very rich and had a title," she said. "We got engaged because he seemed a good idea. But, actually, it wasn't."

Back in Ireland she hunted with the Galway Blazers, founded by her ancestor John Denis O'Rorke in 1844 – and amazingly for the 1940s – became the hunt's first woman master. But she soon formed her own pack and kennelled them at her splendid Georgian home, Birmingham House, near Tuam, Co Galway.

Life at Birmingham House continued in the style of the Anglo-Irish gentry, most of whom had long been driven from their fine houses by IRA arson squads or the tax gatherers of the new Irish state. On normal

days hunts started at 4pm in the summer house during which Cusack Smith would sometimes sing her favourite song, "The West's Awake". Dinner was always early. The social highlight of the year was the annual hunt ball – described by one guest as "the last clarion call of the stranded gentry" – which was always held on the first Friday in January and continued until this year.

Molly Cusack Smith, hunting horn at the ready, presided over this grand affair, encouraging reluctant diners to leave the hall with deafening blasts from her hunting horn.

Nimble of mind and sharp of tongue, she was known throughout Ireland for her strong language and her ability to scold anyone foolish enough to cross her. Desmond Guinness recalls an occasion when the pack was pursued by an angry farmer who started to stone Cusack Smith and her horse. She ordered her companions to move on while she remonstrated with her tormentor. A member of the party who stayed to give her support was rendered speechless by the ferocity of her attack.

On another occasion, when she was giving luncheon to a party which included the President of Ireland, she is reputed to have told a senior ecclesiastic of the Church of Ireland, who had presented himself a minute or two before the appointed hour, that he had better "get to *** out of here" so that she might complete her preparations.

To say that she was formidable is to do her an injustice. As

with old Mrs Knox in *The Irish R.M.*, she directed her underlings with bluntness "while she herself pattered all spheres."

Although she never died in her old age she grew impatient

of any retelling of an anecdote that had currency throughout the country and was told wherever enthusiasts of the turf or the hunt congregated. According to the story, when a groom remarked

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Michael O'Toole

Footsie hits another peak in subdued trading

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

ANOTHER record-breaking session, although it was a far from convincing performance. Many experts felt that with New York seemingly catching its breath, the stock market would do well to avoid a sharp downturn.

In the event Footsie strolled to yet another peak, ending 33.1 points higher at 7,516.1, and supporting indices often in more robust form, hit new highs. This week Footsie has had a remarkable run, climbing nearly 170.

Trading, however, was often subdued yesterday with many investors prepared to sit on the sidelines.

Again financials provided the powerhouse. The takeover stories may be looking tired and bewhiskered but there is no denying they still have a tremendous impact on sentiment. Institutional buying, as well as hopes that shares with Far Eastern connections will continue to recover, are other influences.

Standard Chartered, the best performing blue chip for most of the session, illustrated the recovery attraction. Year's profits, next week, are expected to be flat, down to £855m, as Asia extracts its inevitable toll. At one time up 64p, the banking group ended 45.5p higher at 764.5p.

Only weeks ago the shares were humping along at 543p, lowest for more than two years. Before the Far Eastern crisis erupted last year they were as high as 1,081.5p.

HFB, figures on Monday, gaiced 82p to 1,772p.

The shares have moved between 2,347p and 1,366p in the past year.

Other financials buoying Footsie included Schroders, the investment group which hit a 2,170p high, up 100p. The still family controlled group could be a major player in any consolidation and make a tempting target for a range of growth-conscious financials.

The co-voting shares rose 66p to 1,865p. Both classes however, are exceedingly narrow markets and it takes little activity to provoke sharp movements. For example recorded volume in the non voters was only 19,552 shares.

Elsewhere Safeway, the supermarket chain, ignored the threat of a profits warning, gaining 14.5p to 375p and EML, the showbiz group, responded to a statement that Sir Colin Southgate will continue as chairman, with an 10.5p gain to 494.5p. Jim Fifield remains chief officer of EMI Music.

Rank, the leisure group, reflected its results with a 9p gain to 340p and Bass fell 26.5p to 960p as speculation strengthened that it would emerge victorious in the battle for Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts with an exceedingly rich 1.7bn offer.

Diageo, the wine and spirit giant, fell 10p to 605p as a spokeswoman denied that LVMH had sold any of its

11 per cent interest. Cash-rich Associated British Foods, in busy trading, rose 23p to 630p (after 645.5p) on rumours of an acquisition.

BAA firmed to 561.5p as Robert Fleming described the airport group as "a safe and defensive utility with strong asset backlog". Salomon Smith Barney lifted its British Aerospace target to 2,300p,

helping the shares 32p higher to 1,880p.

Engineer TI Group held at 490p. Merrill Lynch believes the relative fall over the past six months has been overdone. It expects a recovery shortly. The shares touched 690.5p in October. Difficulties in the group's mechanical seals division have created the unease. Merrill sees group profits of £223m last year and £245m this year.

Profit warnings were again a restraining influence. Albert Fisher maintained its reputation as a perennial underperformer, falling 6.5p to 25.5p as it warned interim figures would be lower.

SHL fell 22p to 291.5p after saying interim results would be little changed. Shares of the recruitment selection company were floated in October at 245p.

Combe became the latest drugs casualty, crashing 76.5p to 118.5p after warning that two of its three potential drugs

TAKING STOCK

Remember Pan Andean Resources, the little oil explorer which crashed more than 100p to 30p in a day?

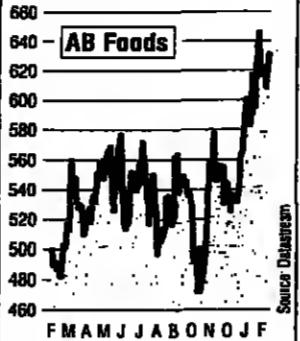
The shares have been firm this week on talk of intriguing developments near its Bolivian field where the oil being sought was found to have "migrated". Repsol, the State-owned Spanish giant, is drilling next to PAR's Bolivian site and, if stories from the jungle can be believed, may have scored a hit. It seems the Repsol drill produced similar results to the PAR exercise, prompting thoughts the oil which so many

expected to find is still available. Some suspect Repsol may help develop the PAR block. The shares are 35p.

Many reasons are given for a company going private. Tetrotronics, a supplier of high temperature equipment, has come up with a new twist. It has decided its "best interests" are no longer served by having a public market in its shares. A major shareholder, Alan Heber-Percy recently died. The shares were 95p on Offer.

Share Spotlight

share price, pence



Source: Bloomberg

Card Clear, the payment and fraud prevention group, returned to market after the reverse £2.5m takeover of HTEC, which supplies loyalty systems. Suspended at 47p in January the shares touched 57p, closing at 53.5p.

Uao, a furniture retailer,

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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

Sema shares soar as Government awards £305m deal to disability assessors

By Peter Thal Larsen

THE DEPARTMENT of Social Security yesterday awarded a huge contract to handle the medical assessment of disability benefit claims to Sema, the Anglo-French computer services group. News of the deal, worth £305m over a five-year period, sent shares in Sema soaring. They ended the day up 7.5p at 1910p.

Under the terms of the controversial contract, which has faced stiff trade union opposition, Sema will take over the management of 220 Civil Service doctors, 1,200 administrative staff and the 3,000 part-time doctors who help assess whether claimants qualify for disability or incapacity benefit.

The DSS said that Sema would

bring enhanced management and increased investment in technology to the Benefits Agency Medical Service, thereby speeding up the service.

John Tilley, managing director of Sema, said: "The Sema Group working with the DSS will modernise the existing provision with the aim of giving claimants service improvements and taxpayers better value for money."

The move is unusual for Sema, which normally specialises in information technology (IT) outsourcing and systems integration projects. Although the BAMS project involves some information technology, it is more of a pure outsourcing project, requiring superior organisational and management skills. Sema is understood to have beaten

off bids from rival outsourcing groups such as Capita and Andersen Consulting to win the contract.

The DSS insisted that the decision to award the contract was not

part of the wider review of the welfare state which is currently taken place, and added that it does not have a dogmatic view about outsourcing services to private contractors.

However, the award of the contract suggests that the pace of outsourcing is unlikely to slow under the Labour government, even though several contracts, like BAMS, were

first dreamed up under the previous administration.

The Labour government has already awarded a £450m contract to handle the pay, pensions and administration for the armed forces to EDS, the US outsourcing giant.

It is also currently conducting trials for a huge contract to improve efficiency in the Benefits Agency and help reduce fraud. Groups on the shortlist include a partnership between IBM and EDS, as well as a consortium including Sema and management consultancy group Deloitte & Touche. The contract is expected to be awarded in the next six months.

However, many large government outsourcing deals have run into problems. The Inland Revenue com-

puter system, designed by EDS as part of a £1.6bn contract, crashed under the burden of self-assessment claims. And a two year delay to a £1.5bn contract designed to pay benefits with electronic "smart cards" and computerise Post Offices around the country, managed by ICL, the computer group, has prompted the government to consider bringing in rival suppliers.

Given the size and complexity of the contracts, industry experts are not surprised that they frequently run into problems. "If I had a huge computer contract to award I would divide it between three or four companies," said Richard Holway, an industry analyst. "But the Government seems to think that these large contracts still make sense."

Bass set to win Inter-Continental with £1.7bn offer

By Andrew Yates

BASS is poised to buy Inter-Continental, the upmarket hotel group, in what promises to be the biggest deal it has ever made. The British brewing, hotels and leisure giant is understood to be on the brink of signing a deal to purchase the 211-strong hotel chain for more than \$2.8bn (£1.7bn) from Seibu Saison, a private Japanese group.

Bass has fought off stiff competition from Marriott International and Patriot American Hospitality, the US hotel magnates, and Ladbrooke Group, the UK leisure group, to win a bidding war for Inter-Continental. The acquisition is likely to be announced within days.

Inter-Continental would be a good fit for Bass, which owns the Holiday Inn chain but lacks a strong, five-star, luxury hotel brand.

The two groups would also complement each other geographically. Holiday Inn has a big presence in the US, while

Inter-Continental is stronger in Europe and the Far East. One City observer said: "This deal makes a lot of sense strategically. Bass has lacked a top-quality hotel brand and this deal plugs the gap that the group had in its portfolio and gives it a good presence around the world."

Bass shares fell 26.5p to 960p, however, over fears that the group may overpay for Inter-Continental. Mark Flanigan, leisure analyst at NatWest Securities, said: "We estimate that Saison makes an EBITDA, [annual profit before interest, tax and depreciation] of around \$180m. If Bass pays more than \$2.8bn the deal will be on a very puny multiple."

Another industry analyst said: "The share price fall reflects nervousness that Bass has been forced to pay too much to win the bidding war. The group is dipping with debt and nobody is quite sure how much debt will be included in the deal."

The deal will create one of

the biggest hotel groups in the world. Inter-Continental has 211 hotels in 77 countries and 24 more under construction. Of these, 117 trade under the Inter-Continental name, including London flagship hotels on Hyde Park and Mayfair and there are hotels in most of the main capitals of Europe. It has sites throughout Asia including three in Japan, and a large hotel in Seoul, South Korea. The group also has 20 mid-market Forum hotels and 50 Global Partnerships, where it has teamed up with local operators to run sites.

Bass already has 2,380 hotels, including almost 1,600 Holiday Inns. It has 134 Crown Plaza sites, its own upmarket brand.

Analysts believe they could eventually be converted to Inter-Continental sites as the group seeks to create a strong position in the premium hotel market.

The deal caps a period of frenetic corporate activity that has seen Bass sell off its tented pub estate, the Coral betting chain and Gala bingo



Room with an upmarket view: The Inter-Continental hotel in Hyde Park, London

Photograph: Lucy Blake

NatWest moves to placate institutions with director appointments

By Andrew Verity

NATWEST, the troubled banking giant, yesterday moved to bring its battle with institutions to an end by appointing the chief executive of Boots, the executive chairman of a packaging company and the man who rescued Lloyd's of London from disaster as non-executive directors.

Lord Blyth of Rowington, chief executive and deputy chairman of Boots, is widely tipped to take over as chairman when Lord Alexander leaves next year.

Sir David Rowland, the former chairman of Lloyd's of London who saved the insurance market from collapse, and Anthony Hahgood, chief exec-

utive of Bunzl, will join the board in April. A spokesman said the move was an injection of "new blood to refresh the board".

Lord Alexander has come under attack for his stewardship of NatWest especially after last year's discovery of a £90m derivatives loss at NatWest Markets, its investment banking arm, the resignation of the unit's chief

executive and the sale of its equities division to Bankers Trust.

Lord Blyth has the reputation for value-driven management which analysts say would be welcomed by investors who have seen NatWest underperform its peers in the banking sector over recent years.

Lord Alexander has indicated previously that he is unlikely

to continue as chairman after completing 10 years in the job in 1999.

Institutions began pressing for new board members last year after the board was seen to have made sluggish progress in fixing a merger to secure the group's long-term survival.

The bank also announced that Sir Desmond Pitcher had

resigned with immediate effect. NatWest's nominations committee, which includes Derek Wanless, chief executive, had refused to renew his nomination.

Sir John Banham, who has become chairman of Tarmac and Kingfisher since joining NatWest, will stand down as he approaches the end of a five-year term. A spokesman for

NatWest said yesterday that both departures were amicable and nothing to do with disagreements over corporate strategy.

City analysts yesterday wel-

comed the move. Shares rose slightly to 1168p from 1160p. As recently as last summer, the shares were languishing at around 700p.

Hong Kong reacts angrily to credit downgrade

By Stephen Vines
in Hong Kong

THE HONG KONG government has reacted with barely suppressed fury after the Moody's credit rating agency downgraded its short-term credit rating for the first time in 14 years. Moody's warned the territory's financial markets face more risk from Asia's economic turmoil.

Sir Donald Tsang, Hong Kong's financial secretary, described the move as "unfair, unreal and improper". He accused Moody's of simply including Hong Kong "in the same broad brush of all the other countries affected by the currency crises", ignoring the stability of the Hong Kong dollar.

Moody's said the downgrade

resulted from increased volatility in East Asian markets, which was affecting the Hong Kong environment. However, the agency noted that the territory's "fiscal situation and regulatory environment remain sound".

Short-term debt of the two Hong Kong railway corporations, previously blue-chip rated borrowers, has been downgraded from Prime-1 to Prime-2. The outlook for foreign currency borrowings of these two institutions and other prime Hong Kong borrowers has also been downgraded from stable to negative.

Although there was considerable surprise at these revaluations, investors seemed less concerned than the Hong Kong government. The stock market

inched marginally upwards after a day of lacklustre trading. The benchmark Hang Seng Index rose 0.6 per cent to 10,551.70. Stocks likely to be affected by the Moody's re-rating showed no sign of being marked down.

Moody's also raised some eyebrows by reclassifying the outlook for China's bonds, notes and bank deposits from stable to negative. It said the downgrade reflected "policy constraints associated with exchange rate management" following the incorporation of Hong Kong into China. This could have "possible adverse effects on the competitiveness of China's export sector over the immediate term".

In other words, Moody's believes China will not devalue its currency and make it more competitive because it fears this may destroy the fixed link between the Hong Kong dollar and the US dollar.

There is no indication in recent export figures that China is becoming less competitive. The export sector continues to account for less than 10 per cent of the Chinese economy's output and is therefore far less important to the economy as a whole in comparison with the Asian countries suffering from financial turmoil.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, Peter Gontha, a businessman close to the family of President Suharto, said a currency board,

which would peg the rupiah to the dollar, would be effective in stabilising the currency, but only if banking reforms were completed first.

Mr Gontha has been widely rumoured as the person responsible for bringing the currency board proposal to President Suharto's attention - a claim he has repeatedly denied.

Speaking at a discussion on the currency board, Mr Gontha said he did not believe, as widely feared, that such a system would trigger a rush for dollars in turn forcing Bank Indonesia to deplete its foreign exchange reserves defending the currency.

Indonesian stocks fell for a second day as the prospect of the rupiah being pegged to the dollar became less likely. The Jakarta Stock Exchange Composite Index fell 1.02 points or 0.21 per cent to 495.2.

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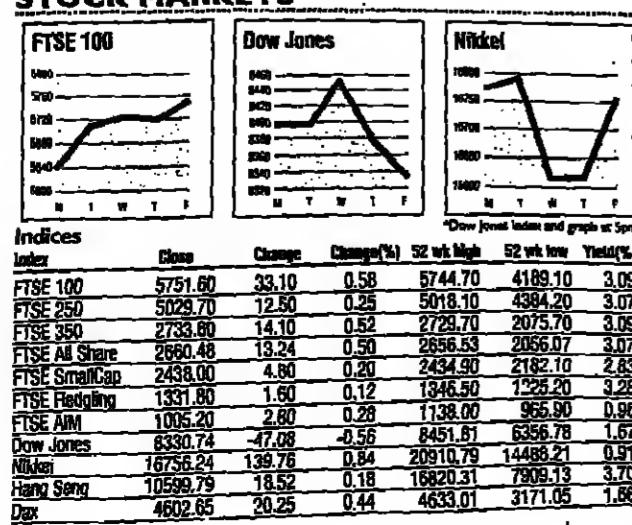
There is still a possibility of new tax initiatives in a supplementary budget to be issued once Japan's parliament has completed the budgetary process at the end of March or in early April.

"We are confident that from here on, all of those measures will produce a multiplier effect and that our economy will certainly have a strong recovery," said the LDP in the introduction to the package. However,

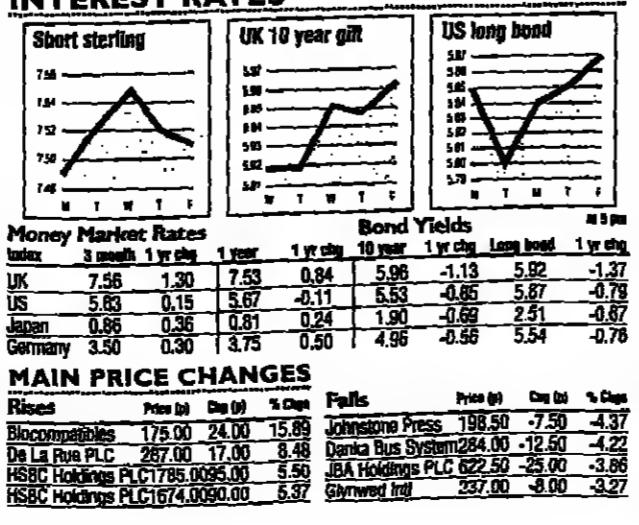
this is the fifth so-called economic stimulus package to have been issued since the Asian financial crisis began at the end of last year. None of the packages have been viewed by investors as tackling fundamental problems.

Japan's apparent reluctance to reflate the economy is a major problem for other Asian nations who have been looking to Tokyo to give the region a lead.

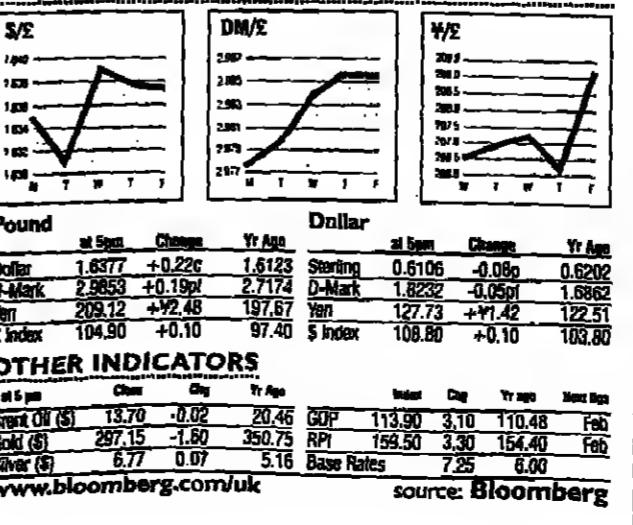
STOCK MARKETS



INTEREST RATES



CURRENCIES



MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Raise	Price (p)	Chg (p)	Chg (%)	Yr Ago
Bloomberg	175.00	24.00	15.7	43.37
Johnstone Press	198.50	7.50	4.37	
Dunkin' Donuts	267.00	17.00	6.48	42.22
De La Rue PLC	2075.70	2055.07	-5.65	3.09
HSBC Holdings PLC	178.00	0.00	0.00	3.36
JBA Holdings PLC	622.50	-25.00	-3.66	
Gurney Ind	237.00	-8.00	-3.37	
HSBC Holdings PLC	1574.00	900.00	5.57	

Source: Bloomberg.com/uk

TOURIST RATES

Country	Rate

</tbl_struct



JEREMY
WARNER
ON HOW
VIRGIN IS
BECOMING
THE BUTT
OF
BRITAIN'S
ANTI-
BUSINESS
CULTURE

Why Branson is suddenly getting a poor press

Poor Richard Branson. Little more than two weeks ago he was basking in the glory of his courtroom victory over Guy Snowden of the national lottery – another triumph for Britain's best known and, according to the surveys, most admired businessman. Now everyone seems to be ganging up on him again, and this time the attack isn't led from the front, as it was five years ago, by his old *bête noire*, British Airways.

Both the *Economist* and the *Spectator* have this week challenged the financial credibility of Mr Branson's burgeoning business empire. *Panorama* has broadcast a knocking programme about Virgin Trains, his Channel Tunnel Rail Link consortium has collapsed, and there is a growing whispering campaign against him in the City.

What's going on? Is the Virgin empire really in difficulty? Or is this simply another case of Britain's penchant for doing down successful entrepreneurs, a symptom of our generally anti-business media and culture. Or perhaps this is just Mr Branson falling victim to his turbo-charged publicity machine. Those that court the limelight should not be too surprised when journalists and others start critically nosing around in their affairs.

Neither of the two magazine pieces told us anything we didn't already know about Virgin, or at least suspect. The *Spectator* article was, in any case, largely inaccurate polemic. Certainly it is common knowledge in the City that none of the Branson empire outside Virgin

Atlantic makes much money, but then because many of these businesses are still in the start-up phase, that hardly comes as a great surprise.

It is also generally known that Mr Branson hides the secrets of his finances behind a cloak of secretive offshore holding companies. Again, this is not uncommon among billionaires. By the same token, it is also entirely reasonable in such circumstances to ask, why the mystery? Could he be hiding something?

Even so, Mr Branson does not, on the face of it, seem to be in any more trouble financially now than he's ever been. In fact, he insists, with cash generation of more than £150m a year, the Virgin group has rarely been as healthy. Almost all his new ventures are externally financed by strong outside partners. Even the much and deservedly maligned Virgin Trains is claimed to be ahead of budget and on schedule for a stock market float this summer.

Financially then, the true position seems to be the very reverse of what is suggested, so much so that Mr Branson can confidently plan for many of his businesses to be listed over the next few years in London and elsewhere. But even if this were not the case, even if the empire were on the brink, does it actually matter to anyone other than Mr Branson, his partners, bankers, creditors and employees? Probably not. Because Mr Branson is a privately owned and run empire, there aren't any shareholders potentially disadvantaged or deceived by his secrecy.

Moreover, the present absence of dividend-demanding outside shareholders to answer to

may enable Mr Branson to take a longer-term view on investment and growth than would be possible for a publicly listed company. This, in any case, is what Mr Branson claimed in the late 1980s when after an unhappy few years as a publicly quoted company he took his interests private once more. Certainly, he would be unable as a single publicly quoted company to engage in the same range and diversity of entrepreneurial activity and startups.

So why the knocking copy? One possibility which shouldn't be entirely discounted is that this is just more dirty tricks – competitors trying to undermine him. It happened once before, with British Airways, so it could happen again with some of the other entrenched monopolies offended by Mr Branson's competitive business ventures and style. Both Pepsi and Coke have a powerful interest in doing him down, as does Camelot, and the big high street banks with Virgin Direct. All these companies will be smiling broadly at Mr Branson's bad press, even if they didn't initiate it.

But actually, all this has probably got much more to do with the fascination of Mr Branson and his astonishing success than anything else. In his relatively short business career Mr Branson has managed to create one of Britain's most widely recognised brands internationally. The only one I can think of which might come close is, ironically, British Airways.

Behind it all, however, lies a business em-

pire of surprisingly little substance. That's not to say Virgin is small or insignificant in business terms. Plainly it is not. But set against the extraordinary reputation and presence Virgin has achieved both domestically and internationally, there's not a lot there. As the *Economist* tells us, moreover, much of it is loss-making. If Mr Branson succeeds, he will over the next 10 years correct that position. The size of the business and its profitability will begin to match the fame of the brand.

This is the reverse of how most companies achieve reputation and brand recognition. Usually brand awareness stems from a particularly desirable and innovative product. In Virgin's case it seems to be the other way round. The name has a power and persona all of its own, which Mr Branson and his partners are using to target the soft under-belly of entrenched monopolies operating across a range of commodity products and services.

There's nothing unique in this approach. Mr Branson has compared it to the *keiretsu* and *chaebols* of the Far East – links between families of companies operating across a range of different industries – but there are some parallels in the West too. For instance, Nike is attempting to use its hugely powerful sports apparel brand to force its way into related but until recently quite separate areas of the market like sports equipment.

In Virgin's case, part of the reason for this brand-first, product-later approach is historic. There's nothing unique in this approach. Mr Branson has compared it to the *keiretsu* and *chaebols* of the Far East – links between families of companies operating across a range of different industries – but there are some parallels in the West too. For instance, Nike is attempting to use its hugely powerful sports apparel brand to force its way into related but until recently quite separate areas of the market like sports equipment.

The brand originally grew out of Mr Branson's activities in the music industry, which were sold to EMI in 1992. Mr Branson's career since then has been devoted both to nurturing and developing the Virgin image, and to finding new businesses in which to exploit it. The only obvious failure so far has been with Virgin Trains, whose poor service quality has begun seriously to detract from the Virgin image elsewhere.

Most of these problems appear to have been inherited from British Rail, but enough of them are of Virgin's own making as to raise doubts about the quality of management more generally. Even so, none of this seems to me to warrant a blanket debunking of Mr Branson. When there's good cause for this, I will be among the first to pick up the pen. But in truth, Mr Branson is just a clever and accomplished entrepreneur. I suspect that one of the reasons he's getting a bad press is that very human thing – that we just love to hold people up to knock them down.

We also still have a tendency in Britain to mistrust business success, even when it comes from someone as apparently user-friendly as Mr Branson. For all Mrs Thatcher's efforts, she failed to shift this anti-business undercurrent in British culture. The fact that Mr Branson has done so much himself to change perceptions, and make entrepreneurship something British people aspire to once more, is in itself an admirable thing.

Albert Fisher shares slump 20 per cent on profits warning

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

THE TROUBLES at the food group Albert Fisher deepened yesterday when the company issued yet another profits warning, forcing the shares down to their lowest level since 1982.

The shares slumped 20 per cent to 26p when the company said its first-half profits would be lower than last year because of the strength of sterling and poor trading at its fresh produce and North American divisions.

In a further blow to investors, the potential buyer of the group's seafood operations has walked away, meaning the company will now be able to return only limited funds to shareholders. Albert Fisher had hoped to sell the seafood business for around £100m.

Although talks had reached their final stages, the terms were affected by the current ban on imports of prawns from India. Albert Fisher is now expected to cut its dividend, which currently yields more than 14 per cent.

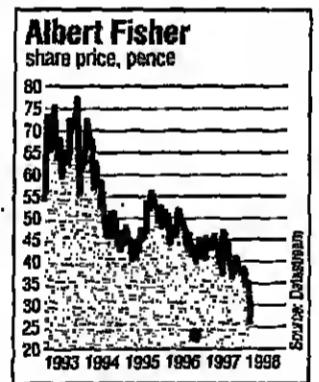
Analysts said the group could become a bid target again, either from an opportunistic financial buyer or from Chiquita, the American banana

group which pulled out of bid talks last year.

One analyst said: "I am speechless. What can you say about this company? Stephen Walls has been a disaster and his position had become untenable."

Mr Walls, the executive chairman who has failed to turn Albert Fisher around after five years, has stepped back to the position of non-executive chairman. He will receive an annual remuneration of £110,000 for just four or five days a month. "That is a disgrace," said one analyst. "His tenure has been a disaster and he should have walked."

Albert Fisher shares have underperformed the market by more than 80 per cent since



Mr Walls took over the executive chairmanship five years ago. He had intended to stay on until the sale of the seafood business had been completed along with the share buy-back.

Neil England, who took over as chief executive a year ago, said: "It has been disappointing but the strategy remains unchanged – to move away from commodity ranges and towards higher-margin, added-value products and to spread risk while improving the quality of the management."

He denied the company was past saving: "Absolutely not. It can definitely be turned around, though some parts will take longer than others."

Analysts have reduced full-year profit forecasts from £24m to £24m. The fresh produce division has been hit by higher than expected start-up costs of a new citrus venture in Uruguay. Its north American operations have been undergoing big management and operational changes and markets have been hit by high raw material prices.

Ian Quinlan, finance director, has been made chairman of the group's north US operations and will spend much of his time there.

City 'biker' adds yet another string to his bow



Sir ADAM RIDLEY, a keen violin player and motorbike rider, has joined the board of Leopold Joseph, the independent merchant bank. Sir Adam is better known in the City as chairman of the Equitas Trust and a member of the Council of Lloyd's, as well as being deputy chairman of the National Lottery Charities Board. He was a director of another merchant bank, Hambros Bank, from 1985 to 1997. Sir Adam, 55, was a special adviser to two Chancellors of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson and Sir Geoffrey Howe, and an economist at the central Policy Review Staff at No 10 Downing Street and at the Treasury. Educated at Eton and Oxford, Sir Adam has been chairman of Strauss Turnbull and a director of the 'Sunday Correspondent', as well as leading a host of other initiatives.

Rank defies critics with upbeat results

By Andrew Yates

RANK, the Odeon to Butlins leisure conglomerate, yesterday claimed to be on the road to recovery after an awful few years which saw its share price plunge to new depths.

Rank defied its growing band of critics by announcing better than expected 1997 results. The group pleased investors by unveiling a rise in underlying pre-tax profits to £303m (£297m) and a 10 per cent jump in earnings per share causing the shares to rise 9p to 340p.

Andrew Teare, Rank's embattled chief executive, said yesterday: "We are seeing the green shoots of recovery. Our

large investment programme is starting to work. It has been a huge job to get it right."

Mr Teare denied that he was facing a management revolt in the wake of the departure of John Garret, head of the group's leisure business, and claimed there would be no further high-profile boardroom casualties: "The board are 100 per cent behind our strategy. The morale is good and our managers are very motivated."

Analytic pointed out that Mr Teare still had a lot of work to do to prove his reforms would be successful. Mark Finnie, leisure analyst at NatWest Securities, said: "There is a glimmer of light at

the end of the tunnel. There are still plenty of questions unanswered but they have bought themselves more time."

Rank's star performer was the Odeon cinema chain, where profits and attendances rose by more than a quarter thanks to films such as *The Full Monty*, which gave the industry its best year since 1974.

The buoyant British film industry has also prompted Rank to give Pinewood Studios a £10m facelift to increase its capacity by 30 per cent.

Rank is planning to accelerate the expansion of its Hard Rock Café chain. Yesterday it announced a deal with a US drinks group to produce a Hard Rock beer which will be

launched this spring. The Hard Rock record label, which has sold 120,000 albums in five months will be expanded. Rank is also looking to open 11 new Mecca bingo sites this year, which suggests it is unlikely to bury First Leisure's troubled bingo division.

But the US holiday business had another disappointing performance, as did *Tom Cobleigh*, which suffered from prolonged delays in new openings.

Rank signalled it was unlikely to launch another share buy-back this year.

The group confirmed it was unlikely to sell any other divisions and would concentrate on revitalising some of its tired hands.

Consumer confidence still higher than normal despite slight dip

CONSUMER confidence dipped slightly this month but remains at an unusually high level. Consumers have become slightly gloomier about the economic situation but they are still upbeat about the attractiveness of making major purchases, writes Diane Coyle.

The confidence index from the monthly survey carried out for the European Commission – a reasonably close guide to future growth in consumer spending – edged lower than January's level and is now some way below its midsummer peak.

However, it stayed well above the long-term average, with the component indicating willingness to buy big-ticket items remaining close to its recent peak.

Separately, a comparison of the whole gamut of monthly business surveys published yesterday by Merrill Lynch suggested that activity in the economy is probably stronger than official figures suggest.

For the final quarter of last year the official figures showed manufacturing output declining and growth in GDP slowing noticeably. However, business surveys all showed an increase in manufacturing production.

Ian Stewart, UK economist at Merrill Lynch, said there was a clear risk of upward revisions for the latter part of 1997.

WHO'S SUING WHO

JOHN WILLCOCK



A COMPANY owned by Harrods boss Mohamed Al Fayed is suing Heathrow Airport over the number of air landing "slots" allocated to aircraft likely to use the company's Executive Jet Centre at the airport.

A couple of years ago the Harrods group bought Hunting Business Aviation from Hunting Pic, and renamed it Metro Business Aviation.

Last week Metro Business Aviation is sued a writ against Heathrow Airport claiming damages over the number of short term slots allocated to the kind of air traffic which would use the Executive Jet Centre. The centre is a maintenance depot which Metro has leased from the airport on the Southero Perimeter Road, Heathrow, since November 1995.

Metro agreed to pay rent to the Centre of £788,000 to Heathrow for the year to 30 November 1997, and then £1,075,000 a year until the 30 November 2002.

Metro was intending to use the Centre to provide engineering services to aircraft,

such as overhaul and maintenance. Metro is claiming that after it had signed the lease for the Centre with Heathrow in 1995 Heathrow changed its policy about providing slots for the type of aircraft that might use the centre.

Metro's writ says: "The best estimate that the plaintiff can presently give is that by virtue of the existence and implementation to the defendant's policy by the end of 1997 approximately 20 per cent fewer aircraft were using the plaintiff's services than in 1995."

Metro's solicitors Davenport Lyons conclude that "the defendant has derogated from its grant". Mr Fayed's company is seeking damages and costs.

NORTHERN & SHELL, the publishing group run by chairman Richard Desmond, is suing New Group Newspapers, publisher of *The Sun*, over an article about Paula Yates in the 14th February paper headed "PAULA: I WILL NEVER TALK TO GELDOF AGAIN".

NORTHERN & SHELL, whose titles include OK! Magazine, Penthouse and Asian Babes, is seeking an injunction to restrain *New Group* from further infringing the plaintiff's copyright by publishing or authorising to be published in *The Sun* or otherwise any substantial part of an article headed "Paula Yates World Exclusive" published in issue 98 of OK! Magazine dated 20th February on the front cover and pages 22 to 43 inclusive and offered for sale on 14th February 1998."

Mr Coulson is editor of *The Sun's* "Bizarre" showbiz gossip column.

The lawyers acting for Northern & Shell are Wiggin & Co of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

ROVER GROUP is suing Innocent Cooper Cars Ltd of Bexley, Kent, and a director of the same company, Michael Fernando, over use of the famous "Mini Cooper" name.

Back in the '80s the Italian firm Innocent built a luxury version of the Rover Mini under license in *Turin* for the Italian market. Now Rover Group is trying to prevent a separate UK company, Innocent Cooper Cars, from "passing off" cars under Rover group registered trade marks. Rover is also seeking an injunction to stop the company from using the names "Mini Cooper", "Innocent Mini Cooper", or "Innocent Cooper".

Rover's writ, issued in the High Court last Monday, also demands that the defendants should disclose on Oath the number of cars in their possession which would come under the terms of the injunction, and the amount of money received as a result of their trade in such cars.

Rover has retained solicitors Martineau Johnson to pursue the case.

1 CAME across a blast from the past in the Chancery writ room in the High Court this week, unearthing a writ which last week was transferred in from the courts in Manchester.

It is the original writ issued four years ago by 198 investors against Greig Middleton, the private client stockbroker, over an Enterprise Zone Trust sponsored by the firm that went sour in the early 1990s.

The investors included one Paul "Gaza" Gascoigne, a well-known footballer, who invested £25,000 in the London Docklands property scheme.

The losses suffered by investors led to the Securities and Futures Authority levying a fine of £100,000, its heaviest ever, against Greig Middleton.

Last September Greig Middleton settled with the investors for an undisclosed sum.

Quite why the writ has resurfaced in the London High Court, now that the whole thing is settled, is one of those strange foibles of the British system of justice.

COMPANY RESULTS			

Fashion week's fanfare for young Britain in Europe

By Tamsin Blanchard
Fashion Editor

LONDON Fashion Week fanfare last night with a little help from the Foreign Office. Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and Doug Henshaw, minister for Europe, were due for a glamorous night out with the fashion pack, although many of the British designers invited to the European Young Designers Fashion Show were unable to attend. They were too busy with last-minute preparations for their shows which kick off officially this morning with Elspeth Gibson's first catwalk show.

"The UK's presidency of the European Union gives us an opportunity to promote what is great about Europe," said Tony Blair. "Our connections with the rest of Europe are not just about trade and markets, but also about stimulating cultural and artistic exchange."

The show last night was held to celebrate the presidency of the European Union, with young designers from each of the member countries invited to show on the catwalk. It was a unique event - a fashionable version of the Eurovision Song Contest except that everyone last night was a winner. Representing the United Kingdom were Julian Macdonald, Matthew Williamson, and Seraph, the New Generation designers sponsored by Marks & Spencer last season.

Macdonald graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1996 and sold his graduation collection to the Knightsbridge store, A La Mode. He shows his third collection on Tuesday night and continues to design knitwear for Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel.

Williamson's first catwalk collection last September made a splash with just 11 outfits. He has been heralded as one of London's most commercial talents and already sells to A La Mode and Joseph in London. Both

Williamson and Macdonald will continue to be sponsored by Marks & Spencer for their shows this week. The sponsorship scheme was launched in 1993 and has helped Alexander McQueen, Antonio Berardi and Clements Ribeiro.

Seraph is designed by Sherald Lamden, 34, who used to work for Tanya Sarne's Ghost. Seraph sells to Liberty and Selfridges, as well as stores in Boston, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. As with most of Britain's young fashion talent, Seraph is very dependent on export sales, with about 60 per cent of business overseas. Shows from the rest of Europe included French labels, Eric Berger and Veronique Leroy.

Whether the Government's dress sense will benefit from the event remains to be seen, although the Cabinet already boasts designer labels such as Ozwald Boateng (tailor of choice for Peter Mandelson, minister without portfolio) and Timothy Everest (worn by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown) which is probably about two more than any previous cabinet. Paul Smith, a member of the Government's culture and media task force, is another new Labour favourite.

Chris Smith admitted yesterday that: "I'm wearing a boring old M&S suit because I've come straight from the office." But, he added, "My tie is by Ozwald Boateng." Pressed as to the other designer names in his wardrobe, he said he also has ties by Paul Smith.

Deborah Milner, Paul Smith, and Tristan Webber have been given slots for the first time on the five-day official schedule. And there are the new names who have been enterprise enough to find sponsorship and put on their own shows. Yesterday, four newcomers included Scott Henshaw, a 22-year-old graduate from the University of Northumbria. His label, Made in England, promises to cash in on the concept of Cool Britannia. The name alone will ensure a following in Japan and the United States.



Young Britons on the European catwalk: Opening London Fashion Week last night were (main picture and above) Sherald Lamden, who designs for the Seraph label; a Julian Macdonald (below) who shows his third collection on Tuesday; and Matthew Williamson (bottom), hailed as one of London's most commercial talents

Main picture: Honor Fraser

The Independent

fashion

Spring 98 special



Art and fashion are having a fling. Our 48-page fashion special gets you up to date with the latest from both worlds. Sarah Moon photographs this spring's newest looks in the spirit of the season's muse, Frida Kahlo. Go behind the scenes with Vivienne Westwood as she explains the inspiration behind her new advertising campaign. And see exclusive pictures by Richard Billingham, star of the Royal Academy's Sensation show.

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مجلة انجليزية

Adrift in the Atlantic



Marooned somewhere between the Sahara and South America, it's easy to lose yourself in La Palma, writes Simon Calder

You cling to the edge of the known world, feeling like a player in the most hellish Wagnerian drama. Above, dark anvil-like clouds hammer against each other as they jostle for the privilege of drenching the tourist. Below, the steely Atlantic reaches the end of its unfettered run from the Americas by crashing angrily against impasively mighty rocks. Any minute now, you fear, the volcano that sprouts from the centre of La Palma is going to want to join in. Better get back to the bar. Luckily, there is a nearby scattering of spruce pastel dwellings beneath sturdy red roofs that remind you that you are still adjacent to civilisation. Hispanic style.

Whatever universe this island occupies, it has extraordinary properties. Often, you cannot tell when the ocean ends and the heavens begin, nor where the molten lead of the surf transmutes to the solidified lava of the shore, nor identify the point at which the rocky terrain melts.

Or a weary farm building. Land, sea and sky; nature and artifice – these merge together miraculously in Isla de La Palma, a forgotten little sister of the Canaries.

Imagine that a geological cataclysm has bestowed the Isle of Wight with a string of 7,000ft mountains, arranged in the manner of a question-mark through the centre of the island. The remodelled isle is then transported to a point 150 miles west of the Sahara, the furthest-flung of a family of seven. You can't get much more marginal than that. The second-smallest of the Canary Islands hangs to the volcanic skirts of its larger, more popular siblings. La Palma feels cast adrift – which, for the visitor, is a wonderfully liberating feeling.

But first, you need to get there. You know the feeling when a journey has been such an ordeal that you just know you're not going to enjoy the destination? That was how I arrived in La Palma. You can't fly direct from Britain – which, say some, is part of its charm. So I flew from Gatwick to Tenerife's southern airport, and tried to connect with a flight departing from the northern airport.

After a horribly early start, a couple of cancelled buses and a £40 taxi ride, when I finally boarded the (inevitably delayed) plane to the island, I was fully expecting La Palma would feel more like a stress-related illness than a paradise island.

The final approach sorted that out. The pilot came in from the north, providing a splendid flypast of an island that seemed to protrude from the sea like a giant, ragged emerald. A sharp U-turn swung us around for the landing, on a runway that sticks out from the side of La Palma in the manner usually reserved for aircraft carriers. This was clearly no ordinary island.

"Next time, you may want to take a taxi," smiled Gregorio as I climbed out of the car. He handed me a card that showed he was an off-duty cab driver. By day two, the unexpected drain on my finances had left me in no position to take taxis around the island, and I was hitching (embarrassingly successfully) to supplement the scarce bus service around the island.

The buses, though rare, are cheap and reliable: between the capital, Santa Cruz, and the second town, Los Llanos, the cost is £2. The thousands of migratory birds that pause here would cover the journey in eight miles, but by tortuous road the trip takes more than an hour. If you want to make a success of a career selling power steering, set up in La Palma. The airport runway is the only straight stretch of Tarmac on the island.

You soon get the hang of knowing instantly where you are with a single glance. Windswept plains tumbling into

the sea means Wagner country, the exposed west coast. More sheltered and gentle terrain, with the grey outlines of Tenerife and La Gomera rising offshore like whales, implies the east coast. And when you can't see beyond the end of your nose, you must be in the mountains.

La Palma's catchline is "The Green Island". In tourist-speak, "green" invariably means "wet". Bearing the brunt of 3,000 miles of Atlantic Ocean makes La Palma the dampest of the Canaries. Even if it's not raining at sea level, you can easily go upwards and check in to a cloud. I spent considerable time trying to reach the various miradores recommended as affording the finest views. But those argumentative clouds always came along for the ride, and I would return to Santa Cruz for the company of humans rather than cumulus.

La Palma has fewer people than the Isle of Wight, with just 80,000 inhabitants – a number exceeded on most days by tourists in neighbouring Tenerife. There are occasional charter flights from Germany, but as a tourist you are a relatively rare species in La Palma. So expect a more than usually generous welcome.

And once you start talking to people, you realise that you're not in Spain at all. For a start, the language has a winningly lazy pronunciation, with none of the Castilian lisp. The suspicion that fact you're on a misplaced speck of South America is increased when you leaf through the Canary Islands newspaper. Each of the seven islands is covered in turn, all the way down to the 'islands' of La Palma and neighbouring Hierro.

The next page is marked "La Octava Isla" – the eighth island – and shows a map of Venezuela.

Since 1492, the Canaries have been part of the New World, spiritually rather than geographically. You can fly direct to Caracas and Havana, the two cities with the largest Canarian communities. And towns like Santa Cruz de La Palma have picked up Latin American touches, like the exquisitely elaborate galleries ambitiously applied to tall, handsome homes. A main street is named, in the Latin manner, after an obscure Irish adventurer: O'Daly (in Spanish-speaking America, O'Higgins and O'Reilly get namechecks). A replica of the *Santa Maria*, Columbus's vessel of discovery, is the closest that La Palma gets to a tacky tourist attraction. Walking around Santa Cruz is like rambling through a version of Old Havana where things actually work. There is an energy, an intensity, that you rarely find outside the inner core of Latin American capitals.

The wayward vibrance of La Palma is easier to reach than any of these distant lands. But only just.

Getting there
The easiest way to reach the island is on a charter flight to Las Palmas, changing to a local flight or ferry. Simon Calder paid £230 for a five-day holiday in Tenerife with Thomson, including charter flights from Gatwick; he travelled on to La Palma on a flight operated by the airline Binter, which has frequent links between the Canary Islands. Fares, though, are high: the one-way ticket cost £40. The inter-island ferries are much cheaper; he sailed back to Tenerife for £10, including a berth. To hire Gregorio Diaz's taxi, dial 44 44 62.

More information
The best books about La Palma are the East and West Walking Guides by David and Ros Brown. Spanish Tourist Office, 22-23 Manchester Square, London W1M SAP (0171-486 8077; brochure-line 0891 669920).



Between the desert and the deep blue sea: La Palma is the most remote of the Canary Islands

Photograph: Nik Wheeler

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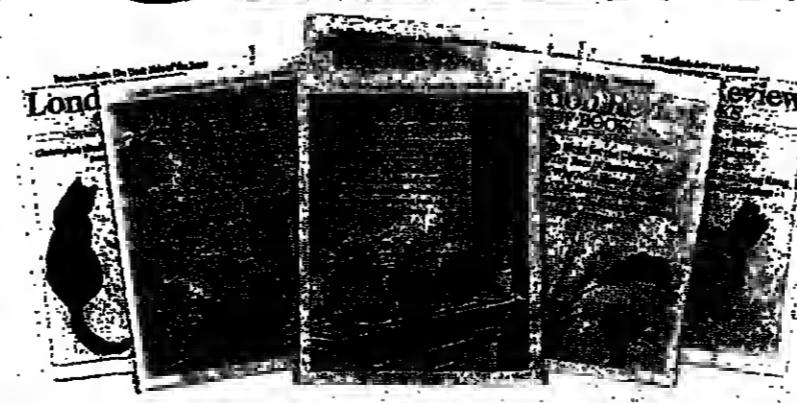
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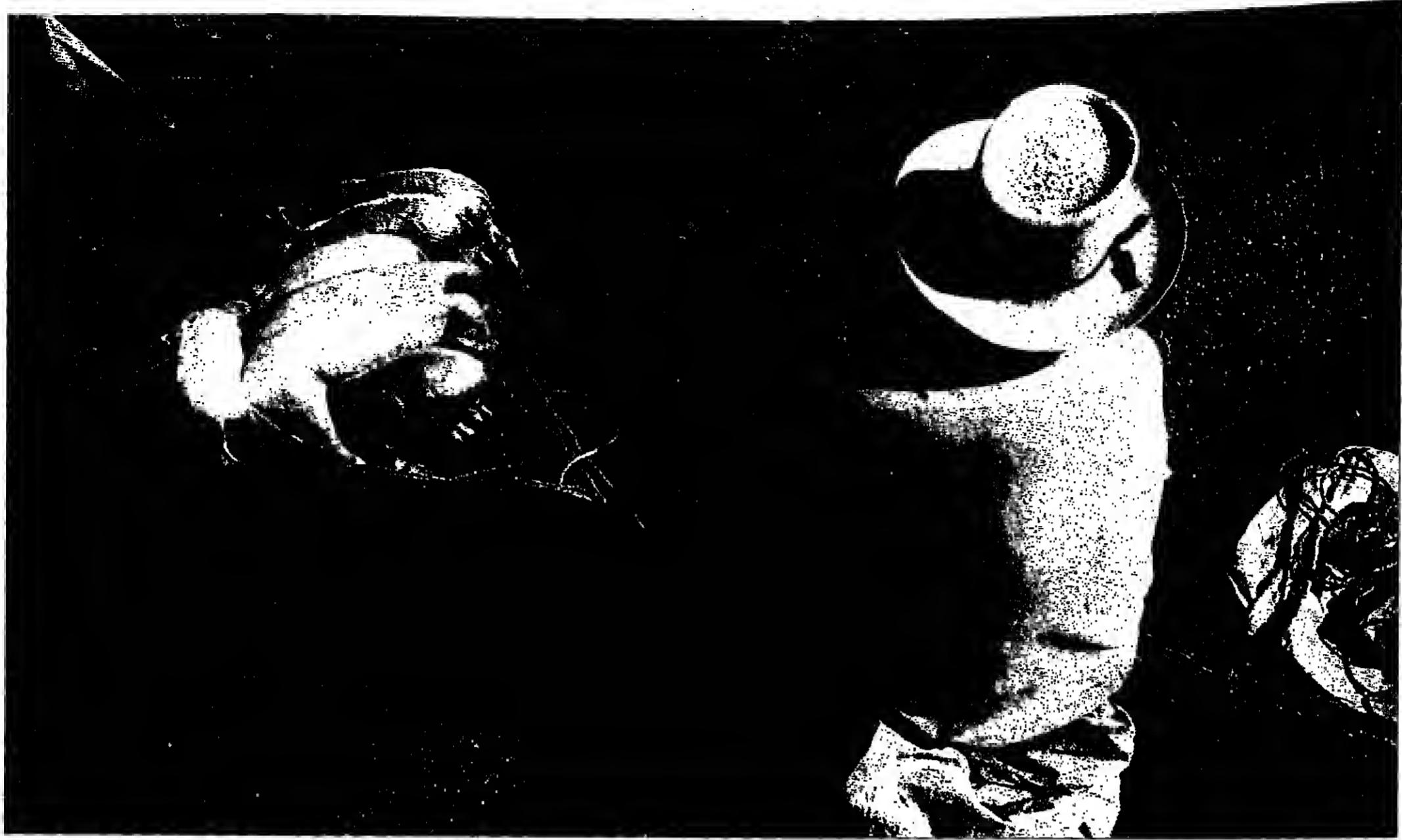
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An isthmus tale

From the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean on the Tehuantepec line, with Hugh O'Shaughnessy



Weetman Pearson's legacy: scenes from the Tehuantepec line, above and below

Photograph: Bossemeyer/Bilderberg/Network

It's a bargain that no serious traveller can turn down: a day-long train journey from the Atlantic to the Pacific with interesting travelling companions, traversing swamps, jungles and mountains, with a chance of observing Mexico unvarnished and at first hand, for the equivalent of £350. The service includes newspapers and a series of exotic dishes and fresh fruit brought to your seat.

The Tehuantepec line, which was built in the 1890s by Weetman Pearson, later a British MP, goes from the Caribbean port of Coatzacoalcos due south to Salina Cruz on the Pacific. It has more to offer than

Pajaritos, a tropical Rotterdam whose lights and pipes were winking at us from across the water.

As I prompted, he timidly recalled the name of Weetman Pearson, later Lord Cowdray, engineer, oil man and founder of the Pearson empire – owner of the *Financial Times* – who came to this town to put it on the map and make money. "He laid out Coatzca and did it very well, you know. He was a good planner," said Rafael.

Pearson, a Huddersfield man who was a genius at working out costings, arrived in 1896, having earned his fame by giving Mexico City, which was often under feet of

connection between the US East Coast and California, and was gratefully used by the Hawaiian cane farmers to get their sugar to New York.

Given the violence and robbery that is sweeping the country, and the horror stories that are commonplace in the capital, I asked Rafael before we parted what precautions I should take against cut-throats on the train the next morning. He laughed. "There aren't any robbers on that train. The people who use it are so poor, they've got nothing to steal. No one goes round this country stealing goats and chickens."

Get to Coatzca station any morning of the week at 6am, pay your 42 pesos and 50 cents at the cobwebbed ticket office which still contains some of Pearson's original office furniture, then walk a short way up the track to two rickety carriages. These are stuck behind a few motley goods wagons, the whole brought up with a yellow caboose with two little lookout towers on the roof. You heave yourself aboard, and in the dark take your pick of battered seats. Before the diesel growls into life, a boy has come round with the morning's *Diario del Istmo*.

Dead on 6.55am our train, half-filled with passengers, set off on the 302-kilometre journey to the Pacific, which was scheduled to take nine hours. I'd taken the precaution before leaving my hotel of vigorously emptying bowels and bladder, a sound idea given the smell coming out of the lavatory compartments. I had also brought food and water, though in view of what we were about to offer, that was not so vital.

In the marshy meadows the horses were just beginning work, and children were playing round their palm-thatched huts. The maize fields were starting to show up green. Suddenly the carriage was filled with fresh and noisy young people in their Sunday best. "We're Seventh Day Adventists going to pray," said the girl who sat opposite me. "And that's our leader," she added, pointing

to a fat young woman in Girl Guide uniform, sitting across the aisle. She simpered. Everybody seemed to be enjoying the journey for the simple reason that that is what trains are about.

As we began to climb out of the swamp more industry appeared, a sulphur works with acres of yellow mineral tipped on to the sidings, then a cement works, spotlessly clean and obviously managed with fearsome efficiency.

The young Adventists alighted at a halt as rapidly as they had arrived. They were replaced by a swarm of boys and women selling tacos, empanadas, soft drinks, sweets, empanadas, bananas, oranges, and egg custards in little pots sprinkled with cinnamon. The fruit had been picked minutes before from trees that line the track. It is a well-rehearsed operation. The sellers all get on at the same station and alight half an hour later. I couldn't discover how they got home. They would have had to wait hours for the train in the opposite direction.

Then Fausto boarded. Only on the Tehuantepec railway could I have met Fausto. He is a 77-year-old Zapotec with a head such as you see carved in hundreds of prehistoric sites hereabouts. He had long since retired from his job as a telegraphist on the line; he showed me his rail pass with pride, and demonstrated that his waist had lost none of its suppleness. His grandfather had worked on the line, and he knew that "*un inglés*" had engineered it. Mexican railways weren't a patch on what they had been, he sighed. The sleeper from Mexico City to Mérida, he showed me his rail pass with pride, and demonstrated that his waist had lost none of its suppleness. His grandfather had worked on the line, and he knew that "*un inglés*" had engineered it. Mexican railways weren't a patch on what they had been, he sighed. The sleeper from Mexico City to Mérida,

new polite phrases in Zapotec, over a fresh orange cut in half and flavoured the Mexican way with salt and chilli. Then talk turned to how Tony Blair was doing.

At Matías Romero we stopped, 90 kilometres short of our destination. I strolled on to the platform, looked at a 100-year-old steam monster silent beside the platform, and chatted to the engineers. "The locomotive needs changing. It wasn't pulling," they explained.

I reported back to Fausto. "Don't you believe it. It's Sunday; no one much is travelling and the crew could do with two hours' overtime," said my Zapotec friend

a brace of fine white chickens.

Then we came out of the mountains and into the Pacific plain. Just short of Salina Cruz, the train stopped. No railway building, no platform, just a rusty iron sign in the wilderness with the single word "Pearson". Weetman Pearson's jeties are still to be seen at Salina Cruz, hemmed in now by a container port and Mexico's largest oil refinery a mile or two down the coast. I went into town and thought of the contractor over a couple of glasses of orange juice at a bar called the Hawaii. Rumours abound that the Mexican and US governments are preparing plans to develop a shiny

Children travel for two-thirds of the adult fare when travelling with an adult.

Charter flights: there are now numerous charters, mainly from Manchester and Gatwick, to the Mexican resorts of Cancún and Puerto Vallarta. (Note that many of these stop to refuel en route.) Charters are mostly sold as part of package holidays, by operators such as First Choice (0161-745 7000), Airtours (0541 500479) and Thomson (0990 502580). Some flights may have space for "seat only" customers; expect to pay around £250 return to Cancún, and slightly more to Puerto Vallarta.

Getting around: specialist travel agents such as Journey Latin America (0181-747 3108) and South American Experience (0171-976 5511) can sell flight tickets both to and within Mexico; air passes on Aeroméxico and Mexicana are excellent value. To reach Oaxaca from the capital, you can fly in around an hour or take a bus on a journey of about nine hours. The overnight train takes 14 hours (on a good day).

Red tape: visitors require a tourist card, which is issued free by the airline when you embark, or at the frontier if you enter by land. If you arrive by land from the US, it will be assumed that you are a day-tripper and no tourist card will be offered; you must ask for one.

More information: Mexican Ministry of Tourism, 60 Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 5DS (0171-734 1058). Note that this office takes a substantial siesta, closing each day from 1.30pm to 3pm.

Victoria Rees

most of the world's railways but it makes its demands, and they include tolerance and patience.

I spent the evening before my journey in a style Graham Greene, who passed this way in the Eighties, would have envied. I drank coffee on the quayside with Rafael, the terry superintendent, as he told me of his unpublished novel about the supreme wickedness of God. As he talked, he kept one eye on the vessel with its cargo of lorries, cars and passengers, watching its captain guiding it, in the gloom between the tugboats and the super tankers, the kilometre across the black, deep Coatzacoalcos river. There are four ports on the river, which serve the giant oil refineries at Minatitlán and

putrid water for months on end. A decent drainage system. He had also constructed a real port at Veracruz, a thing that the Spaniards had never been able to do in colonial times. The Thatcher-like Mexican president of the day admired him, and got him to sort out an existing Jerry-built line and construct the ports at each end which would make the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the second narrowest corridor on the American continent, a serious commercial rival for the Panama Canal that was being built at the time.

Pearson completed the railway, and it is in use to this day – though no longer as vital or as profitable as in the time when it was the quickest

with an air of finality. I went back to my life of Nelson, and snoozed in the warm January sun. True to his prediction, the diesel returned after two hours and we set off again.

This stretch was magnificently mountainous and the line ran through deep cuttings where earth slides swept the windows. Then Fausto got off and a score of passengers boarded who had clearly been waiting for hours. "It's always like this. Sometimes the train comes half an hour early. But it's the only cheap way to travel from our village. There's no real road, and the minibuses cost a fortune," said one young woman. No one had goats or sheep on board, as Rafael had forecast, but one woman had

new railway, an eight-lane highway and bigger oil pipelines across the isthmus, so that, when the Panama Canal stops being US property and reverts to the Panamanians at the end of this decade, there will be a reliable alternative in case of any trouble. The locals complain that they are told nothing, but must be secretly resigned to the fact that the distant powers up in Mexico City seldom tell them anything anyway.

Development like that would certainly bring some much-needed money to the deep south of the country – Mexico's impoverished, corrupt and violent equivalent of Sicily. But I think it would also endanger one of the best train rides on this planet.

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GREEN CHANNEL

Is it possible for travel to aid global cooling? Those ever-positive Americans have come up with a scheme that guarantees "guilt-free travel".

Agents and tour operators involved in the Global Cooling Trees for Travel scheme give customers certificates which confirm that seven trees have been planted for each traveller.

The logic is that a jet emits about 11 ounces of carbon dioxide for each passenger mile it flies, so over a 7,000-mile round trip from London to New York, every person on board will be responsible for about 5,000 pounds (more than two tons) of carbon dioxide. As a tree absorbs 50 pounds of the gas in a year, planting 10 trees will offset the carbon dioxide created during the flight over the course of 10 years.

Brits interested in the idea should link up with a tree-planting scheme in the UK, such as Woodlands Trust, which has a

"Plant a Tree for Cleaner Air" programme. You can work out how many you need to plant by following Trees for Travel's rough guidelines. They suggest planting at least one tree for every 4,000 miles travelled by plane. That tree offsets the carbon dioxide emitted by the aircraft, while two more trees would compensate for the greenhouse effect caused by the nitrogen oxide and water-vapour emissions.

Plant one tree for every 2,000 miles travelled by car, one for every 3,700 miles by train, another for every four days spent on a cruise ship and one for every 10,000 miles travelled by bus. Jet-skiers should plant a tree after every 50th hour.

If we all follow this advice we might cool the planet, but Trees for Travel doesn't mention whether we'd have any land left.

Trees for Travel web site: www.treelighthigh.com. Woodlands Trust 0800 026 9650.

Sue Wheat

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High plains drifter

If the chocolate moles don't tempt you, then the Mariachis surely will. Polli Kaminski escapes to the ancient, unspoilt gem of Oaxaca

"Well" said my friend, who had lived for some time in Africa, "I have eaten hippopotamus, so why not mole?" We were sipping the menu in a Mexican restaurant. *Mole* in Mexico ("moley") is not, she was relieved to learn, a small black creature that digs up mounds in the lawn, but a delicacy that originates in the city of Oaxaca (pronounced "Wahaka") in the heart of Mexico.

Streets around the main market here are crammed with *mole* shops, each selling its own style of this chocolatey, herby, spicy sauce, which is cooked up and served with chicken, turkey, beef or anything else you fancy. My favourite was a really rich plate of fried potatoes immersed in it. Once you have got over the thrill of eating really fresh tacos and mountains of guacamole with refried beans, it becomes clear that the cuisine of Mexico, while interesting in the composition of some dishes (*huevos rancheros*, for instance - fried eggs on a bed of spicy green salsa), is not blessed with infinite variety. *Mole*, which gives Mexican food that small note of individuality, can also contribute to a person's status, as can be seen in the recipes specially

made up for important Oaxacan families.

Apart from this unusual little delicacy, Oaxaca can boast of being possibly the most beautiful city in Mexico. High up the plains in the heart of Oaxaca state, 300 miles south-east of Mexico City, it shines with a light similar to that in Mediterranean cities. Combine this with the air purity peculiar to high altitude and minimal industry, and the effect is stupefying.

Oaxaca is built on a grid system similar to that of New York, but is a fraction of the size; at the end of every long, straight street the city disappears and fresh green hills rise up, leaving you with a disconcerting sense of being cut off from the world.

When the Spanish moved inland from the coast in 1520, they brought with them architecture typical of southern Europe, which can still be seen in the heart of the city. Large, cobble buildings are painted in earthy colours - sand red, ochre and stone - and adorned with wrought-iron balconies crammed with pots of trailing flowers. Through huge wooden doors, high courtyards are massed with tumbling and creeping greenery. Regal stone staircases

lead up to cool and shady rooms where quiet voices echo intriguingly.

All streets eventually lead to the *zocalo*, or main square, the heart of every city in Mexico. But Oaxaca's is different. It is bordered on one side by a flowery, Rococo-style church and on all other sides is crowded with cafés and restaurants, their chairs and tables laid out invitingly in the sun or tucked shyly away in the shade of arched walkways.

To lush gardens at the heart of the square looms the bandstand, a stage for the taleots of earnest young people and practised adults who proudly play on Sunday afternoons and saints' days: Everyone congregates in the *zocalo*: children play, plots are laid, and business deals are negotiated in the shade of the trees.

On the borders, beggars and street urchins do their rounds of the restaurants and cafés, ostensibly selling bits of carved wood or ribbons. The best thing to do is to let them eat your tacos and salsa, and give them bread and butter from your table. Even the poorest give to the poor in Oaxaca. And poverty is here in plenty.

When darkness falls, the music starts up

and every café on the *zocalo* bursts into sound, each one offering a different style.

Young people with extraordinary talent play guitars, pipes, accordions. Others sing. Whatever their chosen skill, their presence is magical, and the square becomes sadly empty when they finish for the night - usually around midnight.

When wailing and strumming starts up around the square, you know the Mariachis have arrived - groups of local players and singers, romantic buskers who invariably play quite badly and sing slightly out of tune, but have masses of charm. And, oh, those trousers ... Low at the hip, flared at the foot, with silver studs from waist to ankle down

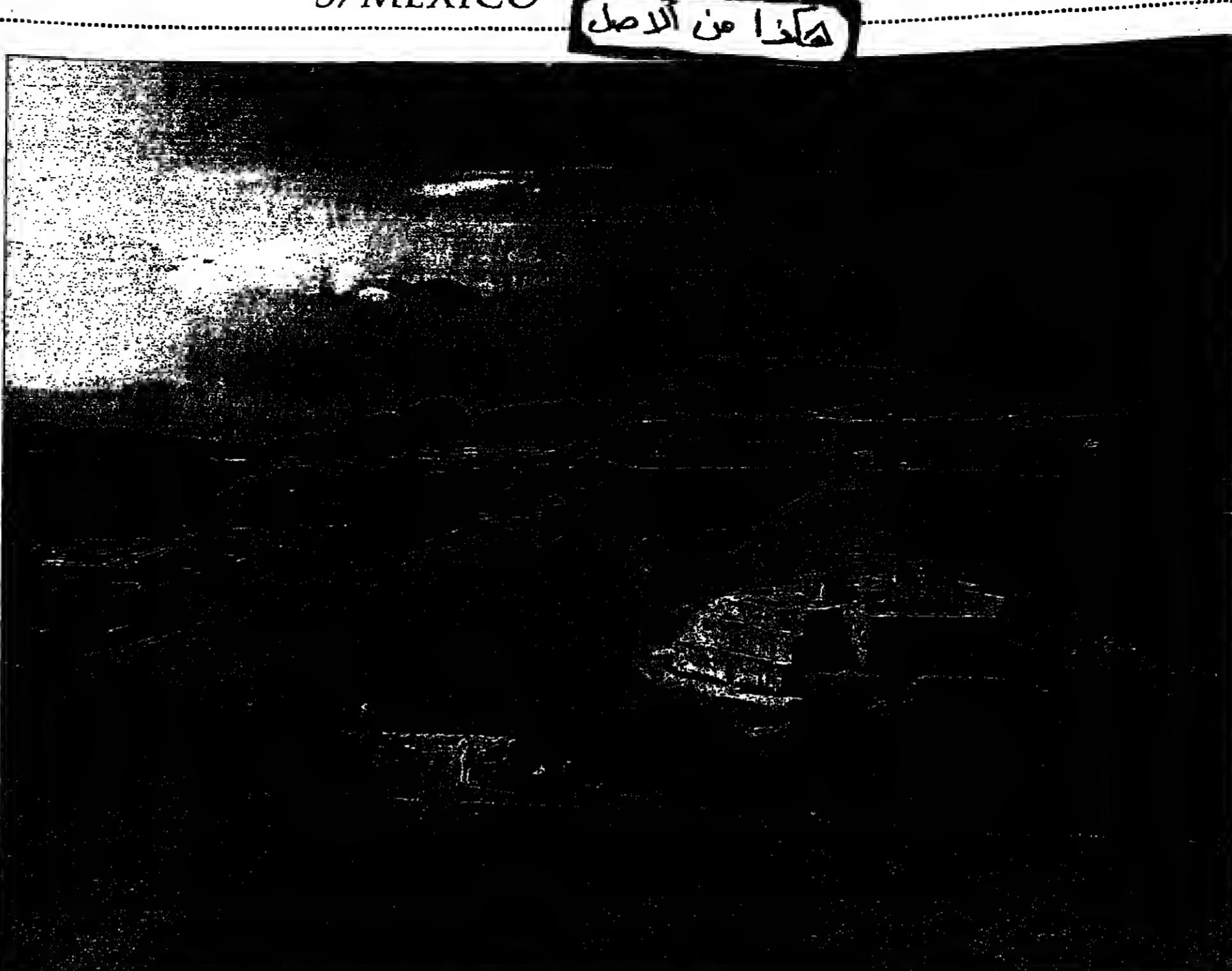
each side and silver-studded belts, they are uniform to the Mariachis but coveted by just about every female tourist in Mexico.

Close by the *zocalo* is the other centre of Oaxaca, the covered market - a place of loud voices and bright colours. Everything can be bought here, from dustbins to leather handbags, and there is a stall selling fruit and vegetable juices where you can realise your barriest recipes: coconut and mango, carrot and guava, and more.

It would be reckless to visit Oaxaca and to miss the magnificent site of Monte Albán. Set on a hilltop about six miles from the city, it is one of the most important pre-Hispanic ruins in Mexico. It was once

the Zapotec capital, and archaeologists have dated its origins to 500BC. Most of the ruins existing today, however, date from AD300-750. The technology required to design and build such a huge complex, which housed a highly organised society, is staggering.

Many treasures were plundered over the centuries, but in 1932 Dr Alfonso Caso discovered Mixtec treasures that had been buried in tombs. Some of these can be seen in the modern museum at the entrance to the site. Meanwhile, if you feel like experiencing life as a true Mexican mole you can visit the vaulted burial chamber, Tumba 104.

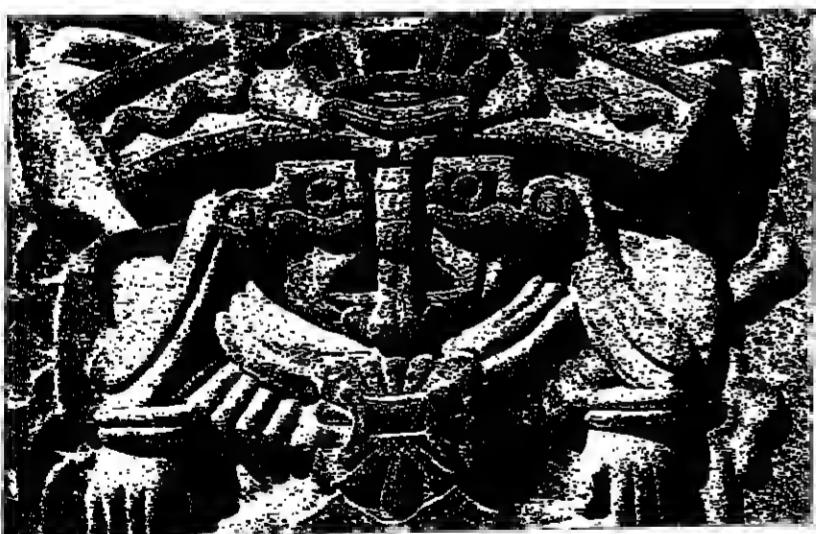


Remains of the day: the ancient Zapotec capital of Monte Albán

Photograph: Pictures Colour Library Ltd

Viva Oaxaca, Vivaaaa!

Andrew Marshall remembers a night of 'purest uncut Mexico', high on mezcal, heady with the old revolution



A Mayan statue near Oaxaca

Photograph: Pictures Colour Library Ltd

Five years ago I went to Mexico to write an economic survey. It was at a time when this brittle and complex country was starting to pull itself together as the debt crisis waned and reform took hold. It was a good story for a journalist. Mexico City was fun, though it was hard work and filthy, and I found it a constant struggle to keep on schedule. But Oaxaca was something else. It gave me a night that I shall never forget, a night of purest uncut Mexico.

I was lucky enough to be in Oaxaca for the Grito, the annual celebration of the first call to revolution. All day, the people gathered in the *zocalo*: quiet, be-suited local worthies, bemused (and increasingly drunk, in many cases) Indians, and the ever-present backpackers. I grabbed a table at a pavement café, sipping the dark Bohemia beer that is a thousand times better than any bottle of something-or-other with a chunk of lime in it. As darkness fell, I switched to mez-

cal, the murderous spirit that has done so much good men.

Then the officials turned up. First came the local soldiery, with rifles bigger than them, helmets slipping over their eyes, and ill-fitting uniforms. They stood around the square looking nervous, as well they might in a part of the country where the state still has only a fragile hold on parts of the countryside. Then came the more serious guys, with automatic weapons and steely-eyed stares. Lastly, the armoured cavalcade escorting the Governor poured into the square with sirens blazing.

The Governor came out to the balcony of his colonial-era palace, and launched the traditional call-and-response with the waiting crowd. "Viva Benito Juarez," he cried. And they roared back: "Viva! Viva el Presidente!" "Viva!" "Viva Mexico!" "Vivaaaa!"

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5/SCOTLAND

Listen, but try to keep your head

Jon Winter goes on a musical tour with an undertone of violence

Anyone who imagines Scottish Highland music as a rather dreary, overly nostalgic genre should consider the content of "Ann Bron Binn", an ancient Gaelic ballad. It recounts the tale of a chap named Arthur who succumbs to the enchanting harp-playing of a beautiful young woman, eventually falling asleep with his head in her lap. Seizing upon his vulnerability, the beautiful woman swaps her harp for a sword and, for reasons that are unclear, lops off his head. Forget All Saints and the Spice Girls, that is Girl Power.

Learning of such savagely romantic ditties is just part of the conversion that cynics undergo when they visit Balnain House in Inverness, the self-proclaimed "Home of Highland Music". Situated in a handsome Georgian mansion on the banks of the River Ness, Balnain House is not just for folk enthusiasts. Visitors of every musical orientation are invited to embark on an brief interactive, audio-visual tour of Highland music.

Your hearing is first introduced to the primitive tones of ringing rocks and droning battle horns popular around 2,000 years ago. To modern ears, these early instruments might sound harmoniously challenged, but when backed with a recording of the wind or the ocean, they combine to make extraordinarily haunting music.

Visitors then continue through a series of themed listening stations, each equipped with headphones, where a selection of tracks can be listened to as you absorb the accompanying written information.

It quickly becomes apparent that far from being inspired by quaint sentimentalities, much of the music has its roots in war, religion and the rigours of everyday life in the Highlands. One area focuses solely on work and communal songs "whose primary function was to increase work efficiency and maintain concentration by providing a steady rhythm". Plog in here and you can listen to, among others, butter churning melodies, spinning ditties and "baulking" (shrinking) tweed tunes.

For my ears, though, some of the more beguiling tunes were those from Orkney and Shetland - eerie, monastic-sounding choral singing, and jaunty fishermen's songs for attracting seals, who have for a long time been thought to respond to such music.

Although for the main part the



exhibition may seem to dwell in the past, Balnain House is no museum. If fact, any restrained museum-like ambience is likely to be kicked out by a dance class enthusiastically stamping their feet on the ceiling above you, or by the reels and jigs of an impromptu music session drifting up from the cafe in the basement. "Cultural centre" is perhaps a more accurate label, a viewpoint reinforced by the noticeboard in the foyer, which is crowded with advertisements for dance classes, instrument tuition, festivals, pub gigs, ceilidhs, instruments for sale and even weekend harp-making courses.

Whatever you make of a visit to Balnain House, arguably the most memorable moment for most visitors is the opportunity to test your musical talents on a number of traditional instruments (including several enchanting harps) on hand around the exhibition. Thankfully, today's visitors have little to fear from homicidal harp-players, but when a group of inquisitive tourists find the bagpipes, you just have to run for your life.

Balnain House, 40 Huntly Street, Inverness IV3 5HR (01463 715757). Admission: adults £3; over-60s, students and unemployed, £1.50; children under 16, 50p. Opening times: 10am-5pm Tuesdays to Saturdays. The Shop contains a wide range of books, CDs, written music, instruments and other learning materials. Fresh Scottish fare, seafood and vegetarian specialities feature on the menu in Cafe Balnain.



Photograph: John Voos

Highlands minus the tartan tat

At this time of year the Highlands of Scotland are peopled by strange folk wearing shiny plastic boots who look up with frowns at a shining sun but will welcome any leaden, snow-laden clouds that might coax an at-best diffident skiing season into March.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the winter sports fraternity have the place to themselves now. The normal tourist traps, the visitor centres, the toilets and even many pubs stay cold, closed down as if every day was like Sunday, their shuttered faces hideously awaiting the hordes of holidaymakers from around the world who will descend with the midges when the weather warms up.

I ended up there by simple accident, really. First, let me say something about timeshare. It can be a great way of getting holiday accommodation, where you trade your week in one part of the world for someone else's in another. But the system creaks noisily when it comes to British holiday destinations, and when we came to trade in our time in Florida for something closer to home it was neither close to our London home nor a very attractive prospect: the Scottish Highlands in February.

And as "Auntie", our 39-year-old Rover, lumbered up the A9, the snow started to fall and we only just got to our first stop, at Laggan, a few miles from Loch Ness along the Great Glen, before the blizzard set in. Next morning, the ski set looked happy setting out in their minibus for Aonach Mor, and Loch Lochy looked pretty becoming - extending a wintry welcome to two people and their dogs out for a walk in the snow.

That was it for snowfall (though some is forecast

"Scotland in February? You must be mad," they told Bob Carter. But it pays to take the high road without the tourists in tow

for this weekend); but the walking, especially around Loch Ness, remained a delight as the ice at the lower level melted away from the snowdrops in a manner reminiscent of a natural history film of a year in the life of some fluffy Scottish mammal or other.

With the spring sunshine glinting off the snow, driving became motoring again. Isn't it strange how motoring sounds so much nicer than driving?

Motoring means that as you trundle over the twisting, turning road from Invergarry to Loch Alsh to Glen Shiel you stop to take in the view of miles of white peaks stretching to the distance as you suddenly find yourself in what seems like familiar territory.

Where once the Kyle of Lochalsh brought to mind the Skye Boat Song, there is a bridge there now and a car park where taciturn locals cast an eye over my 1950s bank manager's car and refused to be impressed. But they have seen a lot lately, living in a place where the scenery plays host to images of a dope-smoking policeman.

This is Hamish Macbeth country, where the tourists trem in summer. Happily, as with so much in the area at this time of year, we had Plockton to ourselves, and yes, it is just how it looks on the TV: squat Scottish cottages in pink and white lining a placid harbour where small fishing boats bob as only Scottish fishing boats can.

Once on the west coast, there are other quiet

corners of the country where, wrapped up warm and snug, we would snuggly stop to take in our exclusive view. At Arisaig, whence Bonnie Prince Charlie is said finally to have sailed off into exile; there is a stone cairn, in February a quiet spot to stop for a sandwich, so quiet that an otter came out to find out who was stopping at such a strange time of year.

It was even stranger in the seaside resort of Oban, where the watery late winter (or was it early spring?) sunshine also tempted out the odd hatter. Or rather a hoy in swimming trunks was being almost forced into the water by his parents. I guess that's how they get them toughened up in Oban.

Those lonely roads and those empty glens were in such contrast to my previous experience of this area, a decade before, in August. My chief memory from then is of crowded camp-sites and a view, when driving, of coach company logos from Bonn and The Hague on the backs of those lumbering tourist busses-on-wheels. It really does pay to take the high road when nobody else is doing so.

Halfway through our fortnight we travelled down the A9 - the only road I know to have had its own commemorative postcard, which of course invites you to burst into McGonagall verse:

Ooooh, it's a wonderful road, the Old A9,
It runs down Scotland in a wiggly line.

We followed it down to Kinloch Rannoch, the very heart of Scottish shorthread and tartan tourist country with the pictureque pass of Killiecrankie (deserted), Pitlochry (almost deserted, with almost desperation prices in the shops) and Queen's View over Loch Tummel where we watched the sun go down, setting the loch on fire, a view crowded with tourists in the summer hut, again, an experience on that day shared by just the two of us.

From that spot you can just see the top of the one mountain we did go up, Schiehallion, 1,083m above sea level, where mud on the lower slopes made way for up to a foot of old snow at the top, carved through curious shapes by the winter wind but in places untouched by human foot, a bit of a contrast to Ben Nevis where packed ice from too many boots made the going too treacherous. The mountain glared down through the mist daring us to come and have a go if we thought we were hard enough. We weren't and didn't.

The search for true solitude reached its successful conclusion on the marshy expanse of Rannoch Moor, proudly described as Europe's largest wilderness area. You drive from the hotel on Loch Rannoch to where the B846 peters out by Rannoch station and then set off along the side of Loch Laidon. Pretty soon the only sound is the wind and the birds and you can imagine the moor stretching off into infinity. It is lonely enough to send you a little hit mad, but then wasn't that what everybody said when we told them we were driving from London to the Highlands in a 1959 Rover in the bitter days between New Year and spring.

"Scotland in February? You must be mad."

Sea spray and superstition in old East Neuk

Traditional seafaring life still clings to the battered coast of Fife, as Alison Thomas found

It's the sound of the sea that draws you back to the East Neuk of Fife. Even on a calm day its murmurings and whisperings are everywhere. And when storm clouds gather, it charges in like a wild beast, hurling massive sheets of swirling spray over the high sea walls, drenching the streets of the villages, splashing the very doorsteps of the houses that huddle by the shores of the Firth of Forth.

Small wonder that the East Neuk fishermen have always been fiercely superstitious. Although modern technology has made boats safer, old taboos linger on. Rabbits, pigs, hares, the very mention of their names can provoke the monster's wrath.

But the day we walked along the coastal path from Anstruther to Pittenweem, its mood was benign. The winter sunshine laid a golden trail that danced and shimmered on the water, and only the occasional momentary feather of spray drifting

across Anstruther's outermost pier gave any hint of its latent power.

It wasn't far to walk, but with a nine-year-old in tow there were rocks to climb and shiny pebbles to gather - and anyway, why hurry? It was several hours before we made it up the steep cliff path and down the other side to Pittenweem harbour. We arrived in time to watch a fishing boat carefully manoeuvre its way through the narrow entrance, a scattering of noisy gulls circling overhead as if piloting her home. Another had already slipped safely inside and the crew was preparing to land.

East Neuk fishermen are a hardy breed. Once you could watch them at work in other harbours along the coast. Now only in Pittenweem do you catch a glimpse of a disappearing world. Yet the East Neuk remains a close-knit community, and a surprising number of fishermen still live here, even those who sail from Aberdeen, almost 100 miles away. Watson, Gourlay, Murray - the names of the crews today are the same as those on the lichen-covered tombstones of the spray-drenched kirkyards.

And the past lingers on. You see it in the colour-washed houses, their red pan tiled roofs and crowstepped gables a legacy of the days when the East

Neuk was an important European trading centre and vessels from the Low Countries brought in pantiles as ballast. You feel it, too, in the sea caves, home to monks and hermits over a thousand years ago, and on the rocky shore where smugglers once unloaded their booty.

Each village retains its own sturdy individuality. Anstruther, its feet planted firmly on the ground, is the homely, purposeful one. Crail has a more comely air, with its handsome merchant houses, tranquil streets and picture-book harbour, whose ancient stone walls curl round protectively, embracing the boats that shelter there. Pittenweem is characterised by the bustle of the fleet and the steepest, narrowest "wynds" of all the coastal towns. In St Monans, too, houses jostle untidily from the high ground to the shore and its church crumples squat and defiant so close to the water that when the tide runs high the surge of the surf mingles with the hymns.

The sound of the sea was with us too when we visited a friend in her low-ceilinged cottage on Anstruther's Esplanade. To the front lay the estuary, where stepping stones lead at low tide to Castle Street beach and the centre of town. To the back, we looked out over the high wall of her brine-

splashed garden to the waters of the Firth beyond. We didn't worry when our son disappeared, for we knew where to find him. When sand, sea and rock pools are a quick clamber over the sea wall away, where else would a nine-year-old go?

It is the sea that has given the East Neuk its rich historical heritage and a succession of colourful heroes. Like Andrew Wilson, the notorious 18th-century smuggler whose execution in Edinburgh's Grassmarket led to the Porteous Riots. Or Captains Alexander Rodger and John Keay, whose thrilling finish in the great tea clipper race of 1866 made national headlines. Or William Smith, Arctic explorer and whaling skipper, who brought back to his native Crail the gigantic jawbone of the largest whale ever caught off the Greenland coast.

The whaling trade may be a thing of the past, but when we wanted fish, tarty haddock we didn't have far to go, although it was fortunate for us that the tourist season was over. Anstruther Fish Bar has quite a reputation. Throughout the summer people come from far afield, willing to queue for an hour or more in the chilly east wind of Shore Street. When your meal left Pittenweem fishmarket only that morning, it bears as much relation to the

flaccid, greasy fare of the average chip shop as a freshly-picked tomato to its tinned counterpart.

Tucked away behind the Scottish Fisheries museum, in the buildings of an old smoke house and cooperage, we found a seafood establishment of a very different kind. With its sophisticated menu, including hot canapés with your aperitif and petit fours with your coffee, the Cellar Restaurant seemed an unlikely venue for the down-to-earth folk of Anstruther.

But this little corner of Fife is surprisingly cosmopolitan. Elie, with its golf courses and its pleasure boats, is where the gentry live, or in the peaceful farming communities inland. And only 10 miles away lies the ancient town of St Andrews. Its university attracts the well-heeled offspring of Middle England, its Old Course lures golfers from all over the world, and its beguiling combination of cloister, golf and gown make it a popular retirement home for world-weary city dwellers.

Ten miles. A 15-minute drive. Another world.

Tourist Information, 70 Market Street, St Andrews (01334 472021). The Cellar, 24 East Green, Anstruther (01333 310374). Anstruther Fish Bar, 17 Shore Street (01333 310518).

48 hours in South Tyneside

The 'Angel of the North' sculpture has thrust attention on Gateshead and its surroundings. Simon Calder checks out the prospects for a weekend break south of the Tyne

Why go now?

Because the vast span of the new *Angel* is already a tourist attraction. Because no one that I know has been for a weekend break in South Tyneside. And because if and when you need some big city life, Newcastle is just a bridge away.

Beam down

Virgin Trains and GNER bring you from most parts of the kingdom direct to Newcastle. I paid £29 return for the three-hour run from London on GNER, booked in advance on 0345 225225. For other fares and timetables, call National Rail Enquiries on 0345 84950. From Newcastle Central station you can walk across to Gateshead or take the highly efficient Metro railway.

Get your bearings

A series of settlements is strung out along the south bank of the Tyne. The most important and sprawling is Gateshead, directly south of Newcastle. Going east from here, you pass through Felling, Hebburn and Jarrow. The Metro runs between Gateshead and these communities every eight minutes during the day.

Gateshead must be expecting a flood of visitors, because it has two tourist information bureaux in the Central Library on Prince Consort Road (0191-477 3478) and in the MetroCentre (0191-460 6345).

Check in

Finding a place to sleep is more of a problem in South Tyneside than in other weekend break destinations. The MetroCentre Marriott (0191-493 2233) feels like an airport hotel in search of an airport, but has a weekend special on Friday, Saturday or Sunday night of £57 single/£64 double. The Riverside Lodge, on the south bank of the Tyne at Felling (0191-495 0282), is difficult to reach without a car, but has a good weekend rate of £33.50 single/£43.50 double.

Take a ride

... to a ride. The seven-minute train trip between Newcastle Central and the MetroCentre sweeps you really across the Tyne, then swerves to the right (affording a glimpse of an angel) and trundles along to "Europe's biggest covered shopping and leisure complex". Inside is a fully-fledged funfair. A roller-coaster ride costs £1.80.

Window shopping

The MetroCentre resembles a cross between Center Parcs and a high street. This one-stop shopping experience includes



Angel of mercy: if the sculpture continues to draw tourists to the area, a cheerier chapter looks certain for South Tyneside

Photograph: David Rose

touches such as a "Mediterranean village" and team shops for both of the local soccer rivals, Newcastle and Sunderland. No wonder so many of the shops elsewhere on South Tyneside are boarded up.

Take a hike

Clutching your new Sunderland away kit (and possibly your jaw, the MetroCentre also has an on-site dentist), you can quickly escape to one of the most beautiful corners of the North-east. Walk through the village of Swalwell to the start of Derwent Walk country park.

An old railway line leads you gently upwards through an increasingly dramatic valley, carved out by the river Derwent. The first part is prettily wooded. Then a viaduct ushers you across the river and into spectacular open country. You can't see the *Angel* from here but to compensate, one proprietor of Gibside Hall has built a column on the scale of Nelson's in Trafalgar Square. After three bracing miles you reach

the village of Rowland's Gill. Either take a bus back from here, or bear left along the road to the village of Sheep Hill, taking you up a steep and shady valley.

Lunch on the run

Back in Gateshead town centre, the options are limited. M&M's fish & chip shop, on the corner of High Street and Park Lane, promises: "We're not famous, but we are the best." After a scrumptious and satisfying cod and chips (£2.40), I agree.

Cultural afternoon

My ancient guidebook notes that South Tyneside has "extensive populated and industrial areas, with some collieries". Who Gateshead was rich and famous, the town created suitably grand municipal buildings. The exterior of the Shipley Art Gallery (0191-477 1495) maintains an air of prosperity. Inside, the story of the town is revealed in a striking exhibition called *Made in Gateshead*, which

painfully traces the decline of heavy industry and consequent social vacuum that afflicts much of South Tyneside.

An aperitif

Jarrow has a similarly imposing collection of civic architecture, notably the fiercely red-brick town hall. A plaque on the wall commemorates a defining moment in 20th century British history: "the Jarrow Crusade of October 5th, 1936". At the height of the Depression, thousands of unemployed men set out to march to London to demand work and dignity. Drink to the human spirit at the Jarrow Crusaders, a Vaux pub behind the town hall.

Demure dinner
Go to Newcastle.

Angel of the morning

Judging by the crowds around Antony Gormley's sculpture on Wednesday afternoon, the *Angel of the North* will be a huge

success in drawing tourists to South Tyneside. From a distance, the sculpture resembles an upturned Spitfire. The closer you get, the more you appreciate the warmth (if a little rusty) welcome from people across 175ft across.

Unless you are travelling by road along the A1, finding the figure can be difficult. It is perched beside the Durham Road four miles south of Gateshead town centre, reached by bus 1, 21, 25, 26 among others.

Sunday afternoon: go to church Bede's World sounds alarmingly like an ecclesiastical version of the MetroCentre. It is irritatingly difficult to find: the Metro station that bears the historian's name is buried amidst an industrial park east of Jarrow, almost a mile from Bede's World. On Sundays, it keeps maddeningly short opening times (2.30-5.30pm). Yet once you reach it, grumpiness evaporates.

The Venerable Bede lived, wrote and died in the confines of St Paul's monastery for the area.

The present-day church embraces its foundations and even some Roman masonry - Watling Street ended on the south bank of the Tyne. Uphill from the church, you enter fine old Jarrow Hall, where the life of the writer of *Histoire Ecclesiastique Gentis Anglorum* is placed in the context of a turbulent time around AD 700. (You also learn that Bede was largely responsible for counting years from the birth of Christ; he deserves a mention in the Millennium Dome.)

Adjacent, in a most unlikely location, between giant chemical storage tanks and a parade of pylons, an Anglo-Saxon village has been created, complete with 20th-century wattle and daub, and a couple of venerable pigs - the 'Tyneside Two'?

The visitor is bound to note the contrast between the vitality of this made-up village and the dereliction that abounds outside. But if the *Angel of the North* can draw people to South Tyneside, tourism may mark the beginning of a new and cheerier chapter for the area.

Hanging's too good for 'em

Nottingham's Galleries of Justice offer flogging, branding, the pillory and the stocks. Louise Duffield braved the dungeons

Hanging, transportation, solitary confinement, branding with a hot iron - you see it all at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham. The former Shire Hall and county gaol in the city's Lace Market area has been turned into a museum dedicated to crime, punishment and law.

The current *Condemned!* exhibition takes visitors through the days when petty theft could mean years in a filthy prison, and when arson and rioting could lead to hanging. Indeed, the graphic reconstruction of the dubious trial of George Beck for his part in the 1831 Reform Bill riots in the splendid original criminal court room shows how unjust justice can be.

From there, visitors - each bearing a different prisoner number - are sent down to the cold cells to be confronted by gaolers and "punished" for their crimes. They experience the hell holes that were prisons, what it was like to be transported to Australia, and such punishments as the stocks and the pillory. The small exercise yard, still bearing the engravings of condemned criminals, contains a full-size working gallows.

The Galleries bring ideas about punishment right up to date with a thought-provoking and hard-hitting exhibition on hanging - which visitors can avoid if they choose - and suggestions about dealing with criminals in the future. Over the next 17 months the Galleries of Justice will continue to expand, adding new police galleries based in the original 1905 police station, revamped and extended crime and punishment galleries, and discovery galleries centring on civil law. The eventual aim is for it to become the National Museum of Law.

The visitors
Gill Davis, a nursery teacher from



Nottingham's Galleries of Justice
Photograph: Sean Page/News Team

Derby, went to the Galleries of Justice with her daughter Anna, 14, and son Tom, 11.

Gill: There was a lot more there than I thought. I didn't realise we would be going down into the cells beneath. I liked the way we were given our own prisoner numbers and we became part of the system, so that the law process happened to us. It made it personal. The bits where there was sound and video were good in intermediately taking you away from all the reading. You need those bits to break it up. There is a lot of information to read - so children coming here need quite a high level of literacy. Some of the exhibitions would be quite frightening for very young children.

The atmosphere was very good in the court room and cells. The staff who were dressed as gaolers and court officials were highly convincing. I think the Galleries of Justice pro-

vide a good balance between guides and areas where you wander at your own speed. There's plenty to see and do, and I would definitely come back again. You can be in there for quite a while, but when the extra bit opens it will be a full day.

Anna: I thought it was very realistic. The bit about hanging really sticks in your mind. It might be a bit scary for small children but you are given the choice of whether you want to walk that way or not. The guard was very intimidating and makes you feel as if you're a prisoner. I felt I learnt quite a lot about some of the punishments that were given over history, and also that sometimes people's punishments did not fit the crime, but they were just made an example of.

Tom: It was very interesting and realistic in the way they did the court scenes. It was strict. I knew that some

of the punishments were harsh, but some of them were a bit strong. When you stole a loaf of bread you got seven years in prison. Sometimes the deportation couldn't really be called punishment, because you got land. People would commit crime just to get deported, because it was a new start in a new country with no pollution and with warm weather.

The guard who had the scissors to cut our hair who went to the cells was realistic. It was very cold down there. It might have been nice to have had some realistic smells as well.

The deal

The Galleries of Justice is at the Shire Hall, High Pavement, Lace Market, Nottingham (0115-952 0555). Open: Tuesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays 10am-5pm. Closed 24-26 December. As a result of redevelopment the current *Condemned!* exhibition will close on 20 April for expansion. New police galleries open on 6 April, and crime and punishment galleries on 30 July.

Admission: Until 20 April, adults £4.25, children aged 5-14 £2.95, family ticket for two adults and two children £11.95. For police galleries (from 6 April), adults £3.95, children £3.50, family ticket £11.95. From 20 July, police galleries and crime and punishment galleries, adults £7.95, children £4.95, family ticket £23.95. Season tickets, special events and group rates available.

Access: mobility-impaired visitors currently have access to only 60 per cent of the exhibition, but this rises to 90 per cent in July.

Toilets: clean. Baby-changing and facilities for disabled.

Catering: courtyard cafe; and judges' pantry serving snacks, etc, available from 2 March.

Shop: gift shop opens 2 March.

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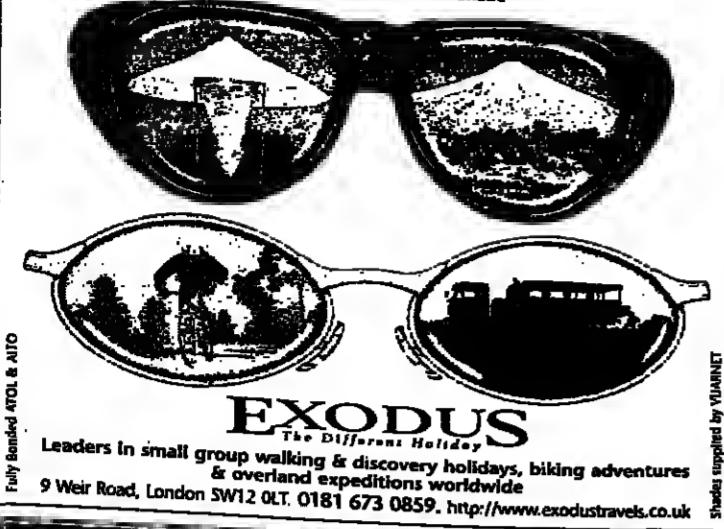
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Ski hell, ski heaven

Snow, food, hotel – satisfying the demands of the whole family can be tricky. For Louise Levene, it took two tries

You can't please everybody. Or can you? Is it possible to find a skiing holiday that can satisfy a five-year-old, an adult beginner, a lapsed intermediate aged 55 and a keen skier? Last year we got it wrong. This year we finally got it right.

The choice of resort for February 1997 was always going to be complicated by the fact that the 55-year-old (my mother) is something of a luxury model. In her extensive experience, hotels are the nice places where they serve caviar from ice sculptures in the shape of the Sydney Opera House. Switzerland, spiritual home of the luxury hotel, seemed the obvious place to look for a resort that would offer village-based skiing but still put chocolate truffles on your pillow. If the brochures were any guide, the obvious winner was a five-star establishment in Saas Fee. How wrong we were.

Our chosen hotel was decorated in a rather queasy mixture of knotty pine and chandeliers. The thing to remember about hotel star systems is that stars are awarded not for taste or charm, but for piffing little things like room safes and shrink-wrapped lavatory seats. Never mind. It looked swish enough – at ground level anyway.

Upstairs was a different story. We had asked for a quiet room on a high floor. What did we get? An overheated second-floor shoebox overlooking a noisy night-club. The bobble-hatted rep with the name of his employers splashed helpfully across his fleece, reminded us that the small print in the brochure stressed special requests could not be guaranteed. My mother, veteran of a hundred Presidential Suites, wasted no time and few words. "It's a horrible room. You know yourself it's horrible. I'm sure you have something else." Within minutes we

had risen two floors and the ceiling had risen by 6ft.

Time for a stiff drink. This very hotel (which shall remain nameless: a lot can happen in 12 months) had once been celebrated in a Sunday newspaper for the staff's legendary ability to remember how you like your Martinis from one year to the next. A likely story. In my experience, hotels have trouble remembering that you ordered a Martini at all. The service in the three restaurants was slower than molasses. Whenever you ate, you were guaranteed 30 minutes staring at a greasy plate between courses, while your five-year-old curled up as the clock struck 10. Nor was the food always worth the wait. Anything in buffet form was delicious, but not for a dish that needed to be bodily transferred from kitchen to table, and you'd better bring a sleeping-bag. These foodie disappointments climaxed in the weekly Lobster Banquet, an extravaganza staged, unaccountably, beside the indoor swimming-pool in an atmosphere optimistically described in the literature as "Karibische", but which was about as Bajan as a stale banana sandwich. The three groups who opted for this fishy fiesta were seated so far from culinary HQ that we remained坊gtoed for 40 minutes at a time while we waited for the next instalment of rubbery crustacean to be delivered to our pool-side sauna by doves in Bermuda shorts.

North-facing slopes and a good fall of snow meant that the skiing was fabulous. But you can't ski all the time. Eating out was almost as disappointing as eating in. We tried lunching in a crowded Konditorei

and were reduced to ordering toasted ham and cheese sandwiches and a small pizza. One doesn't expect much from a ham and cheese sandwich – a global commodity that can be found on every snack menu from Rio to Ramsgate – but there are two things one expects from a pizza: it should be hot, and the bottom should be harder than the top. This pizza failed on both counts. No time to mope words: "Fraulein? Please take this away. It isn't very nice." The waitress looked at me in frank disbelief and removed the plate, only to return with it 10 minutes later, steam rising from the curled pool of cheese. "But we don't want it at all. It isn't very nice," I explained.

"Excuse me madame," hissed the by now exasperated woman, "but this is not a restaurant."

I pointed out that whatever they called

themselves, they had no business putting pizza on the menu if they couldn't defrost it adequately.

We had better meals, but none was exceptional and all were overpriced. It was as if standards fell and prices rose to the levels that would be tolerated by the tourist population, as if the Swiss reputation for good catering had no basis in native pride in the food itself. They do things rather differently in France.

And so, 12 months later, having lost faith in Swiss hotel-keeping, the picky parent agrees to risk a chalet holiday in Méribel. Once again, comfort was the major concern. After wading through page after glossy page of brochures offering rooms that contrive to sleep 12 in a species of bunk shelving that wouldn't disgrace a Tokyo flophouse, we established that Simply Ski was one of

the few operators who understood that queuing for a communal lavatory was not an option. The chalet on only had exemplary en suite plumbing, it also had a cool who could really cook.

So far so good. What about Méribel itself? Pretty. Identical pine chalets, sexy clothes shops, Olympic swimming-pool, divine Savoyard food and a free resort bus ensured that a good time was had by all. The skiing wasn't bad either, thanks to good snow and an outfit called Ski Cocktail which had the adult beginner on blue runs in days and rendered the six-year-old a positive hit.

The other big improvement on last year was the introduction of the Eurostar Ski Train from Waterloo, which takes you to Münich in seven-and-a-half hours, ready for a smooth, half-hour transfer by minibus.

That may sound like a long time to spend on a train, but by the time you've trekked out in Heathrow and spent two hours in Tie Rack, three hours mopping up spilled Ribena in tourist class and three hours helping a toddler throw up into a paper bag on the coach from Lyons, you really might be better off admiring the mistletoe-garlanded trees of Northern France while tucking into home-made sandwiches and playing cards. The picnic was essential. The Eurostar buffet last week was reduced to a peculiar waffle thickly encrusted with sugar and cinnamon that proved to be a close relative of the polystyrene ceiling tile. It can only be a matter of time before they turn up on the menus of Swiss cafés.

Simply Ski 0181-742 2541. Eurostar 03-45 303030

The Méribel mrc pretty place, good skiing, excellent lessons – and you can now get there on Eurostar from Waterloo. Photograph: Ian Jones/Slushout-Offshoot

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9/ECLIPSE TRIPS

The Full Moony

On Thursday, a stripe of darkness will descend upon Latin America. Our turn next, writes Simon Calder – but Britain's travel industry is in danger of being eclipsed itself.

Silence envelops you as completely as the darkness. For the painfully finite seconds of totality, you and your fellow watchers are smothered by a blanket of awe and humility as the heavens show their hand. The meek moon reveals, briefly, its power to suppress a swaggering sun, which can but flare feebly behind the solid black disc. This is a demonstration of astronomical contempt that will live with you for ever.

All of which was completely lost on the merry band of eclipse watchers in Mongolia last March. I had bade farewell to them at the Eurostar terminal at Waterloo. Bearing battered trunks trussed firmly with fine brass fittings, they were setting out by train to a desolate point outside the world's coolest capital, Ulan Bator. About an hour before the 1997 total solar eclipse, a snowstorm muscled over the horizon and rained on the parade of amateur astronomers lined up to watch the universe at work.

They were, my reports suggest, remarkably sanguine about the maddening meteorological intervention. Perhaps that's because we live in an astonishingly fortunate age when cheap travel makes it possible to witness next Thursday's total eclipse of the sun for a sum equivalent to a fortnight's work at the average British wage. While the British are generally characterised as sun-seekers, a substantial minority of us who like to see the orb of our desires disappear. Since the great Indian event of 1993 (where I lost my eclipse virginity), the holidaying fraternity has been looking forward to another warm weather experience.

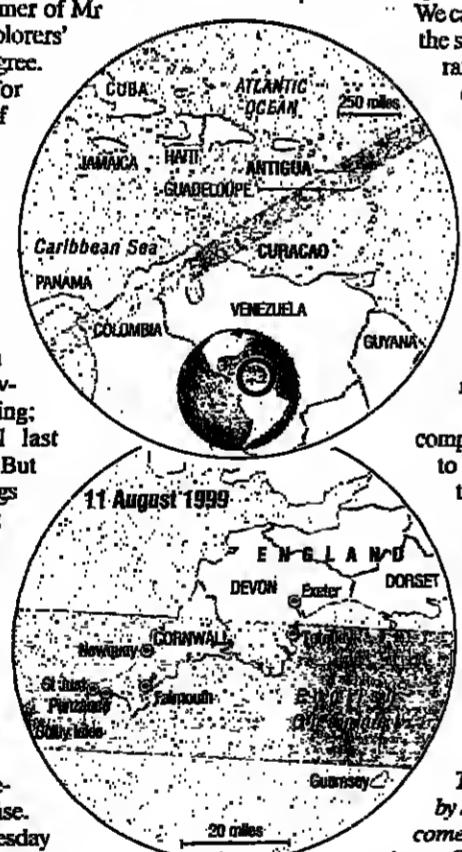
You'd be lucky, though, to find a seat on a flight to the favoured site for viewing next year's totality: the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao. The astronomer Dr John Mason said yesterday there was not a cloud within 1,000 miles of the island.

Roughly once a year, a stripe of the earth's surface will be flung into darkness as the moon blots out the sun. And once you're started on eclipse tourism, it's difficult to stop at the sun. Many enthusiasts track down more esoteric lunar eclipses – when the earth blots out a full moon, with the dramatic results demonstrated (pictured, right) seen in Arizona in 1996.

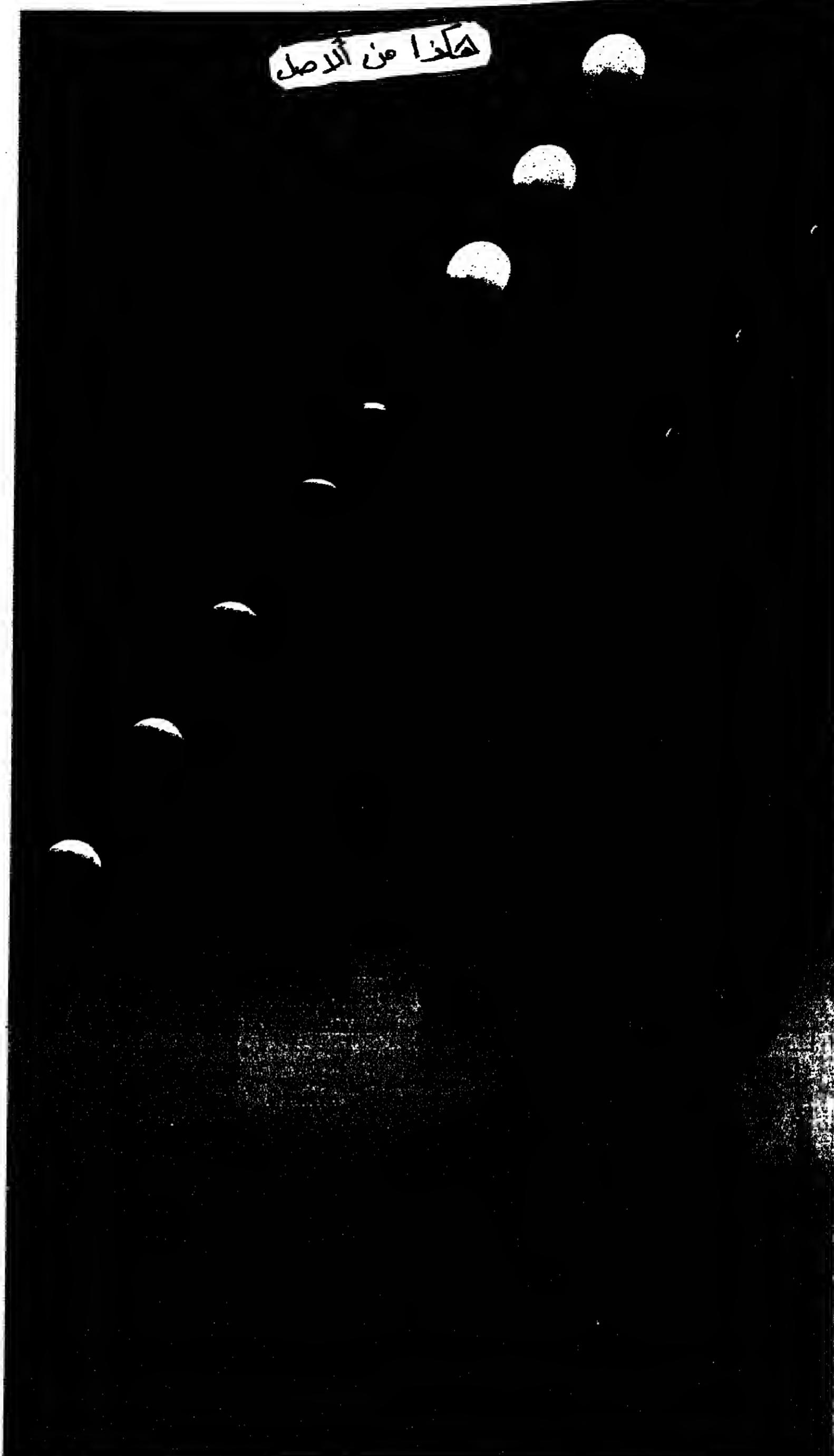
The trick, though, for solar eclipses is to find a venue that (a) you can reach relatively easily, and (b) will be free of cloud cover. A third consideration is, according to the travel industry's eclipse guru Brian McGee: "Ambience – we find there's a trade-off between maximising the length of totality and enjoying the surroundings."

As a satisfied customer of Mr McGee's company, Explorers' Tours, I am inclined to agree. In 1995 I spent the (for me) hitherto unheard-of sum of £1,400 on a fortnight's holiday in India, witnessing the eclipse at the extraordinary abandoned fort of Fatehpur Sikri, between Jaipur and Agra. Totality lasted barely a minute, which for old eclipsians is a seven-stone solar weakening. Thursday's show will last around three minutes. But the magical surroundings of heroically crumbling sandstone made the event a surreal study of humankind, showing not only our innate fragility but also how over-excited we can get about an entirely predictable event.

Predicting the track of an eclipse is a relatively trivial scientific exercise. We know that on Wednesday 11 August next year, at 11.11am,



Explorers' Tours:
01753 681999.
*'A Guide to the 1999
Total Eclipse of the Sun'*,
by Steve Bell (HMSO, £5.95)
comes complete with Mylar
viewer. Call 0171-873 9090.



Moon on the move: time exposure shot of the lunar eclipse of September 1996, seen in Phoenix, Arizona

Photograph: Bob Dunn/Mesa Tribune

Our favourite foreign country, France, yesterday staged an open day at the new French Travel Centre in Piccadilly, central London. But while Saturday opening, refurbished premises and the addition of ferry operators is to be welcomed, anyone planning to visit the country in June or July this year could encounter a series of nasty surprises.

You could blame football, because the World Cup finals will take place around France from 10 June to 12 July. But even with the addition of a million soccer fans there should be room for everyone; France is the biggest tourist destination in the world, with 60 million visitors a year, and



SIMON CALDER

the tournament carefully avoids peak holiday season in Europe. From previous experience, such as Italy in 1990, many people who would otherwise visit the country

will be deterred by the prospect of football frenzy. But those of us who go to France face higher prices and discrimination against single-sex groups.

The best way to travel around western Europe's largest country, for both soccer fans or non-footballing Francophiles, is by train. The excellent Euro Domino ticket allows 10 days of unlimited rail travel for £200. In June and July, though, the price increases by £20; it falls again on 1 August.

Deterred by such profiteering, many travellers will instead take advantage of low cross-Channel fares, and pack four or five people into a car for a jaunt to and around France. But if you're hoping to keep down costs by staying at some of the country's excellent campsites, make sure you take at least one member of the opposite gender along.

"ABTOF takes action on World Cup hooligans", reads a headline in the industry journal *Travel Weekly*. The story reveals how members of the Association of British

Tour Operators to France plan to prevent trouble: by banning single-sex group bookings during the event. So anyone who happens to prefer to holiday with people of the same gender will have problems finding somewhere cheap and cheerful to stay.

The tour operators' real worry is that bunches of drunken lads will cause problems, but equal opportunity legislation means that women-only groups have to be banned too.

Determined "World Cup hooligans" will find it easy to circumvent the rule, just by taking along a token woman supporter (there are some pretty terrifying ones to be found on the terraces of my town, Crawley). But groups of nuns (or monks) visiting France will be barred from campsites, as will gay or lesbian holidaymakers.

How can you find out more about such arbitrary rules and price rises? By contacting the new French Travel Centre. Since the vast majority of British travellers to France do not live within easy reach of

central London, most will have to rely on the phone.

France, you may recall, began the fashion for premium-rate numbers when it replaced its normal London line by 0891 244123, costing 49 pence a minute. Many other tourist offices have followed suit; Australia is the latest to introduce premium-rate lines, though until July you can still call the Tourist Commission on the non-premium 0990 561434.

The strangest policy of all is operated by Holland. The Netherlands Board of Tourism runs a helpful and efficient service using a London number, but says it is not for publication.

The board insists you can find out the number only by first dialling the premium-rate recorded information line 0891 717777. It cost me £3. Living in London, I would have visited in person – except that the office is open to visitors only from 1pm-3pm, Monday to Friday.

The new French Travel Centre is at 176 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL.

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Old habits die hard

Pilchards for dinner, en suite cells with sex-defying single iron beds, lights out at 9.30 – and no whispering. Born-again atheist Michael Delahaye mortifies the flesh at the monastery of La Verna in Tuscany

Some years ago a magazine ran a competition for the most unlikely newspaper headline. The winner, as I recall, was "POPE ELOPES". It was with a similar sense of the incongruous that, just after Christmas, I asked my wife to book us a double room in a Franciscan monastery.

The Sanctuary of La Verna is between Florence and Urbino. Its claim to fame is that for a decade, between 1214 and 1224, St Francis was a regular visitor. But what makes this the second most important Franciscan site in the world, after Assisi, is that it was here the saint received the stigmata – the holes in his hands and feet in imitation of Christ's crucifixion.

Nearly 800 years later, La Verna is still a "working" monastery, with two dozen resident monks and a couple of nuns. And, in the age-old tradition of offering hospitality to weary pilgrims, it takes in paying guests.

For anyone who has ever wondered why holy places are so often high places, La Verna provides the answer – closer to Heaven and about as hard to reach. More than 4,000ft above sea level, the monastery is built on – and into – an extraordinary outcrop of rock. During the winter months it's literally lost in the clouds. As you approach through a forest dripping with moisture, up a series of increasingly tight switch-backs, it's hard not to feel like the unsuspecting Jonathan Harker in one of those early Dracula movies.

The night we arrived, Sister Priscilla was on reception, swathed in black snorak and white scarf. She referred to the bookings list... "Ah, numero ventisei".

Room 26 turned out to be an "en suite cell", 10ft by 10, with a pair of single beds; shower and lavatory. It was clean and adequate, although during the night my wife was to develop a peculiar devotion to the cast-iron radiator. On the back of the door was an injunction against whispering and giggling after 10pm.

For a number of reasons, this is not a place for honeymoon couples. All beds are narrow and chastely

single. *Hic hankum nullum pankum*. Indeed, only in recent years have married couples been allowed to share rooms, although in our case Sister Priscilla had the decency not to demand documentary proof.

For anyone more familiar with hotels, the biggest problem is protocol. Should you say grace before eating? (Optional) Do you tip a num? (No) Or do you discreetly drop a couple of coins into the offertory box? (That'll do nicely. God bless.)

Now should you expect too much in the culinary department. The Franciscans, it soon becomes clear, are not a gastronomic order. Turning over our place-cards at dinner, we were heartened to see "vitello ai ferri" and "anatra arrosto" on the menu. This, we told ourselves, would be a meal to remember.

At this point something like a miracle occurred as the grilled veal and roast duck were transformed into a hard boiled egg, a slice of cheese and half a pilchard. OK, so a fish was once the secret sign of Christianity – hut, Madonna, a pilchard?

When we pointed to the back of the place-card, our server shook his head: "That's the summer menu. This is winter." A diner at the next table murmured "Buon appetito", thoughtfully adding, "Good hunger."

Dinner over, we were about to settle in with a compensatory glass of the monastery's excellent Lamponi – a diabolically tempting 33 per cent proof raspberry liqueur – when we were sent to bed. Lights out, doors locked, heating off. *Buona Notte*. It was 9.30pm.

None of this is to diminish the extraordinary power of the place. You might even argue it helps concentrate the mind. La Verna is Gethsemane without the coaches; Lourdes minus the plaster knick-knackery.

As a born-again atheist, I'm hardly qualified to judge but I've no doubt that anyone seeking the "spirit of St Francis" is more likely to find it here than at Assisi. Of which my clearest memory is buying our daughter a plastic globe of

Santuario della Verna, 53010 Chiusi della Verna, Le Toscana (055 575 5341) Full board: 62,000 lire per person (approx £22)

the abbey as a kind of no-frills parador. There was a student preparing for exams; a jockey Catalan salesman; a few couples touring the region. And me, I was just chasing a good night's sleep.

Vespers. I dragged my new friends on a nature walk. We followed a dirt track into the hills and observed the poplar trees in the dying light.

Middle-aged men, all of them, they groused the whole way. Joaquin kept stepping in the brambles; José feared it would rain; Arman, the sales-

man, was at 2pm," Sor Concepción said, "Lunch was at 2pm," Sor Concepción said, "Lunch was at 2pm," Sor Concepción said,



La Verna is Gethsemane without the coaches; Lourdes minus the plaster knick-knackery

Photograph: Karen Robinson

The great escape to a no-frills parador

All she wanted was a good night's sleep, but Laurel Berger ended up joining the nuns in singing the night office

I'd been in Madrid just a week when the longing began. I'd been staying in a borrowed flat overlooking a square that was the hub of a rowdy neighbourhood fiesta. At night, unable to sleep, I'd drift into a twilight state in which vast open spaces, lovely hills, empty villages took shape in my mind's eye. It was then I decided to get myself to a nunnery.

Traditionally, Spain's monastic communities have offered hospitality to pilgrims and spiritual seekers; but in recent years many have opened guesthouses for travellers as well. For less than £15 a night you can sleep and eat in a religious monument while experiencing the stillness of contemplative life, so I was told.

I telephoned the Benedictine abbey of San Salvador in the village of Palacios de Benavente. It was located, the guest mistress said, 20km north of Burgos, 2km off the pilgrim route to Santiago. No mountains, just grain fields. It didn't sound promising.

I imagined a dilapidated convent in the middle of some backwater ringed by scorched fields; a cell with a pallet bed and a cold-water shower down the hall; coarse meals of bean stews and sausage. In short, the kind of place my lefty Spanish friends wouldn't go to for love or money. But on the list that the Castilla-León tourist board had supplied, it was the only one on my list that had any vacancies. So I went anyway.

The city of Burgos is a three-hour bus ride from Madrid. The taxi I took from there rattled along a country road through the heart of old Castile, a flat, stony, bone-dry land, known for its Romanesque ruins, fabulous churches and arch-conservative citizens.

When we entered the deserted village – a warren of cut stone edifices which looked as though one strong gust of wind would reduce them to dust – the driver stopped to ask directions to the abbey. The woman we addressed looked at us as if she hadn't spoken in the longest time and waved vaguely to the north.

"Are you the girl who called last night?" asked Sor Concepción, the guest mistress and superior, just beyond the massive oak portal. The abbey, which dates from the 12th century, stood on the fringes of the pueblo. Enclosed by a 10ft high wall of unmortared stone, it was sunk into a promontory overlooking lime-capped slopes; attached to it was a small Gothic church with an octagonal apse whose sections jutted out like petals on a flower.



Cross purposes

handing over the room key. "Please be on time." I folded back the bedsheets, slipped off my espadrilles and lay on top of the rough sheets. They smelled of bleach and fresh air. Outside, the noon sun was beating down on the stones but the building's thick masonry walls kept the heat out. I heard birdsong, the sound of a tractor, angelus bells. When I awoke it was time for lunch.

The men and women seated at the long dining table were like holiday-making Spaniards everywhere: loud, garrulous, a bit cheeky. The menu served morcilla, a locally made blood sausage, and roast pork; the Rioja poured freely.

I met a consumptive-looking young writer who confessed that when he first got here he expected to find himself surrounded by religious and suicide candidates. But aside from a couple of genuinely devout Catholics, most of the other guests were searching for nothing more transcendent than a place of repose. They saw

man, was ruining his good shoes. But what is more, be announced in solemn tones, the *hora del aperitivo* was now upon us. He'd been there all week, he said, and he was sick of the nuns' cooking. There was a bar in the next town that was supposed to do very nice tapas.

And so we abandoned our expedition and made our way north in Arman's Nissan to a forlorn little pueblo called Villasandino, where half the locals seemed to be packed into the town's one groovy little bar, which had no tapas whatsoever. We ordered pintas and shared a bag of crisps. As children, they told me, their dread of the church was greater than their dread of Franco. "The priesthood ruled this country for 50 years," said Arman, lighting a Marlboro. "And it was shut up or put up" for the rest of us."

When we got back to Palacios, dinner was already on the table. I picked at my food but polished off dessert, queso de Burgos – a fresh,

honey-tasting white cheese drizzled with honey from the convent's apiary. Although I'd read that it wasn't good form to address the nuns, these sisters, some of whom hadn't left the enclosure in decades, were positively loquacious.

Later, I chatted to one of the oldest nuns,

who spoke of the convent's close association with the great Benedictine abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos, whose monks cut a record of Gregorian chant a few years ago that went platinum.

We chant Gregorian here too, she said, giving

no hint of what she was up to. Perhaps I would like to see the choir?

I followed this tiny figure in sweeping black robes through the unlit cloister, a marble floored gallery with arched windows, built around a courtyard, and stepped into the choir. An iron grille screened it off from the sanctuary, which was dominated by an extravagant Baroque centrepiece depicting Jesus surrounded by the saints of the order. According to legend, in the year 836, the 300 nuns who then lived here lopped off their noses to protect their chastity from invading Moors. The soldiers arrived the next day, chopped off the women's heads and burned down the abbey. All 300 were made virgin-martyrs but the convent remained in ruins until the 12th century, when a nobleman by the name of Count Fernández Manrique paid to have it rebuilt.

And then the nun, interrupting my reverie, handed me an open psalter bearing the legend of Santo Domingo de Silos. At that moment I realised I'd been invited to join them in singing the night office. Now this was an impossibility, considering that I'm practically tone deaf and my knowledge of Latin is patchy; worst of all, I'm not even a Christian. At one point it occurred to me that I should get the hell out of there. But by that time the organist had arrived. The other choristers soon followed, women as small and gaunt as the scrub oak that dotted the hillside. And then the office began. In Latin we chanted:

*I will both lay me down in peace,
and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell
in safety.*

That night I slept very well indeed.

The monastery of San Salvador (0034 947 45 0209), in the village of Palacios de Benavente, is a three-hour drive from Madrid. Single rooms cost 3,500 pesetas a night, doubles 5,000, all meals included. Castilla-León tourist board: 0034 902 203030.

RED CHANNEL

Foreign Office advice for travel in Kenya

"The Samburu, Shaba and Masai Mara game reserves have experienced incidents of banditry. A British visitor was killed in a private game sanctuary at a country club outside Nairobi. Tourists wishing to visit these reserves should be accompanied by guards or tour operators.

A general election took place in Kenya on 29 and 30 December 1997. Political meetings and demonstrations, which can be violent, are likely to continue and should be avoided.

Politically motivated ethnic clashes have occurred in Laikipia and Nakuru districts. A night curfew has been imposed in these districts, including Nakuru town, from 9pm to 6am. Visitors should exercise extreme caution in these areas.

Except as otherwise indicated, game reserves and other tourist areas are generally safe, but muggings and armed attacks can occur anywhere and at any time, particularly in Nairobi and Mombasa. Be alert at all times. Do not accept food or drink from strangers. Avoid travelling after dark and in isolated places, particularly empty beaches. Do not carry valuables or wear jewellery in public places.

Avoid the North Eastern Province, the Tana River district of Coast Province and the Isiolo and Marsabit districts of Eastern Province where cattle raids are frequent."

Foreign Office travel advice is available on BBC2 (Ceefax) p 470 and can be accessed on <http://www.fco.gov.uk/>, or call 0171-238 4503.

HIGH ROAD FROM HEATHROW

You want to spend £640 on a day's outing? Sign up for the 100-minute "flight to nowhere" on Concorde, operated by Goodwood Travel (01227 763336). It departs on 22 March or 5 April. You get a three-course champagne meal and a trip to the cockpit.

LOW ROAD FROM HEATHROW

Or, if you are in generous mood, take four friends to Rome for the day – and still have £15 change. Aeroscope (01608 650103) is offering day trips to Rome on Alitalia for £125 per person, including a free travel card for the Italian capital. Departing at 7.20am, you get nine hours in Rome. The offer runs until the end of March.

هذا من الأصل

A roam with a view

Next week the Government is expected to publish its long awaited consultation paper on extending countryside access. David Foster talks to those with a stake in the debate, and charts the failure of previous attempts to enlarge the 'right to roam'

Nip into any decent bookshop and for around £5 you can pick up an Ordnance Survey map. It is your key to local footpaths, part of a national network extending for more than 100,000 miles.

The same maps also show National Parks. But 50 years ago, things were very different: National Parks were still in the future, and although OS maps did mark some footpaths, their legal status was unclear.

In 1949 came the National Parks and Access of the Countryside Act. As well as enabling the creation of National Parks, the Act required local authorities in England and Wales to produce "definitive maps" of local rights of way open to everyone.

However, the Act was expected to do more. Councils also had to consider making agreements with landowners that would open up vast areas of countryside for people to roam at will. In the absence of agreement, a council could make an access order – if they paid compensation to the landowner. But access maps only had to be prepared if access areas were actually established and, somehow, this didn't happen.

Only five out of 107 local authorities recently surveyed by the Ramblers' Association actually have such maps. In short, the survey concludes that outside the

National Parks, the Act "had only a marginal effect" and the open country provisions "never became a vital part of [the] culture of recreation provision".

The problem, says Anthony Bosanquet, deputy president of the Country Landowners' Association (CLA), is that "local authorities have been reluctant to use their powers because of a lack of finance".

Stephen Jenkinson, of the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers (IPROW) agrees: "In the Peak District they've opened up 80 square miles of extra access," he says. "That's only a tenth of the area of the Snowdonia National Park, but the annual cost of compensation is £250,000."

So much for history. Labour's manifesto promised "greater freedom for people to explore our open countryside", and last autumn the environment minister, Michael Meacher, told a Ramblers' Association meeting that "the right to roam is a central part of our environmental programme... I anticipate that we will be preparing a bill... for the [parliamentary] session which begins in October 1998."

Landowners also want to see more access, though they believe that legislation is unnecessary. In November 1996, the CLA's Access 2000 conference established a policy to "increase the quality, quantity

and diversity of access" by voluntary rather than statutory methods.

Since then the CLA has appointed an access adviser, and is producing an access register listing all non-statutory access provided by their members. Among other benefits, says Mr Bosanquet, this should address the long-standing issue of access that has been granted in return for tax exemptions.

"There is no question at all that when a bargain has been struck with the taxpayer, then the public must be aware of where that access is." His only reservation is that an individual's tax affairs must remain confidential.

Mr Jenkinson welcomes the new access register. "My only worry is that without access to Inland Revenue records, they're relying on voluntary disclosure by landowners." But Kate Ashbrook, chair of the Ramblers' Association, is sceptical. "What the CLA has published so far isn't new – much of it is long-established, customary access. There is very little additional access being generated. But in any case, voluntary access would just be a hotch-potch; it won't be shown on OS maps, and the public won't know where it is."

If there is wide agreement about the need to open up more countryside, there are sharp differences of opinion about the

practicalities – and the costs. Mr Bosanquet believes that a statutory right to roam "would undoubtedly involve compensation for loss of ownership rights" and he questions whether it would be either better or cheaper "than updating the 1949 Act to deal with people who won't fall into line" with a voluntary approach.

Ms Ashbrook disagrees. "We don't think open access needs the same sort of funding as footpaths. We don't expect that councils would need to produce maps. In most cases there will be no dispute about whether the land falls within the new definition." Most moorland, she argues, is pretty clear cut; and while there are problems defining downland, the Ramblers are helping with ideas to make things clearer.

The future depends on the results of the Government's consultation exercise, but any new legislation will probably be administered by members of IPROW.

"Giving people quality information about access is vital," says Mr Jenkinson – and that will involve some costs. Walkers need to be alerted to the seasonal and environmental restrictions that everyone agrees will be necessary. "The problem isn't managing the people who use the access," he says. "The problem is managing the people who abuse it."

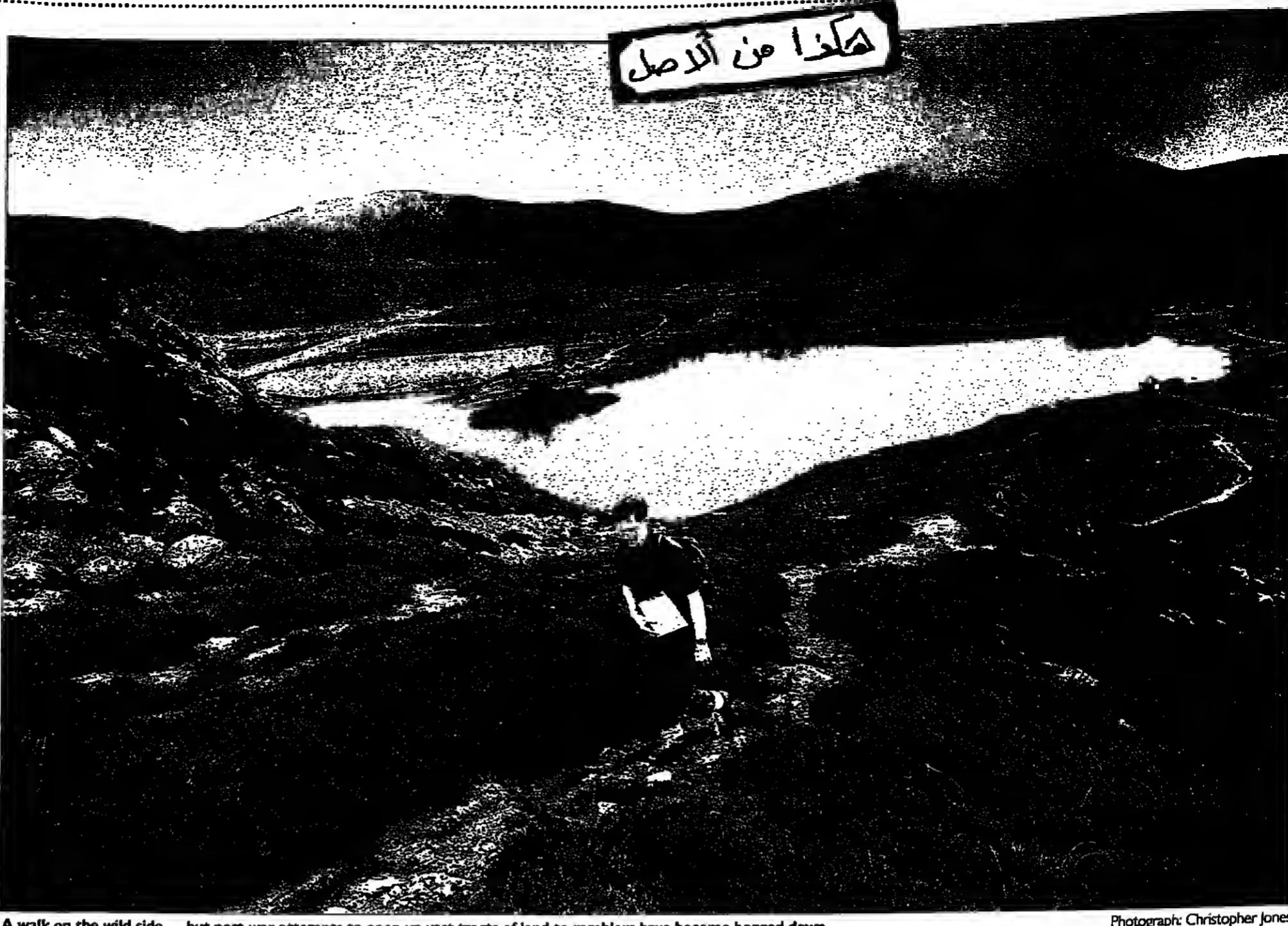
NATURE NOTE

Carrion crows are already starting to stake out their breeding sites. Especially in the early mornings, they proclaim individual territories with long, harsh calls of "kaaark, kaaark", repeated again and again. Any time now they will start to build their nests, which are big, clumsy constructions of sticks, thickly lined with hair or wool, and often placed on top of old nests or squirrels' dreys. Voracious predators, equipped with powerful beaks, crows are most destructive in spring, when they – besides carrion – eat the eggs and chicks of other birds. A famous photograph taken by a Game Conservancy researcher on Salisbury Plain shows the shells of more than 50 pheasant and partridge eggs scattered under one crow's nest. They also crack open hard-shelled titbits such as crabs and walnuts by dropping them from a height, and even gouge out the eyes of ewes which have gone down while lambing and are still alive but too weak to stand. Crows can be distinguished from rooks by the



fact that they tend to be solitary, and are totally black; rooks live in large flocks, and have a white patch around the base of the beak. Also, crows are slightly larger, with slower, heavier wing-beats.

Duff Hart-Davis



A walk on the wild side ... but post-war attempts to open up vast tracts of land to ramblers have become bogged down

Photograph: Christopher Jones

Acts of God and other risks

In the belfry of his church, Duff Hart-Davis ponders the worst case scenario

I fear that we are inclined to take the fabric of our village church for granted. There the stone building stands as solid as the rock on which it is founded, and apparently as un-

changing. Yet nothing brings its potential frailties more sharply into focus than a visit from a representative of the ecclesiastical insurance company.

When I and my fellow

church-warden met him for a routine inspection, I decided to make a job of it and look into the bell loft, which is rarely visited because the only access is through a small door set into the wall of the tower 20ft above the ground.

I therefore took along an extending aluminium ladder, and walked down the lane with it balanced foot and aft on my shoulders, head through the rungs. This drew looks of astonishment from several passing hikers, who clearly thought that a lunatic had been set at large from some nearby institution with a special neck-harness to keep him out of mischief.

Our insurance man was waiting for us, a lively and articulate fellow, smartly turned out in a suit and a dark blue overcoat. Almost his first words were: "As you probably know, 65 per cent of all church fires are started by arsonists."

"Really?" I said.

"Yes. And 25 per cent by lightning strikes." Warming to his theme, he rattled cheerfully on: "If someone set fire to this church, he wouldn't start just one blaze. He'd start several. One here under the tower, one at the altar end."

The result usually is that the building is engulfed in flames before the fire brigade can reach the scene.

"You've got a good deal of wood in here, haven't you? All these pews, the screen, the roof timbers, the floors in the tower ... Stained glass, too, I see. Of course, flames tend to go out through win-

dows and up through the roof. So you'd lose the roof and all the windows."

At first I thought he was pitching things rather high. Then I saw that he was only being realistic, and looking at the worst possible scenario.

As he measured and noted, I kept thinking of the lightning bolt that streaked down during a thunderstorm two summers ago and missed the church by the length of a cricket pitch. The strike, which I happened to witness from across the valley, exploded a giant cedar growing in the graveyard, and flung 100lb chunks of wood several yards uphill.

The discharge of energy was so phenomenal that I doubt whether the church, for all its copper conductors, could have withstood it. Even without a direct hit, we had to pay £1,200 to have the shattered tree removed and £500 to rebuild a stone wall smashed by the falling trunk, so we were glad we could make an insurance claim.

"Slip and trip," the inspector was saying. "That's another thing you've got to look out for." He explained that because people are increasingly litigious these days, and tend to sue for damages at the slightest setback to their persons or property, it is advisable to have no loose carpets, hidden steps or other hazards over which visitors may stumble.

We scored fairly high on that front: less well on the fire extinguishers, which were past their test-by date. One big point in our favour was that

we had renewed the entire electrical system only two years earlier. When we came to the vestry, we were able to demonstrate our contention that the church contains nothing of value.

One key question was, "Do you keep the building locked?" The answer was, "In winter, yes, but not in summer." I feared that this policy might bring criticism, but no – our inspector found it reasonable that tourists should have access to the building.

When it came to the tower, I was the only person who went up the ladder. I was glad to report that the first little room was dry and sound. A rusty iron ladder led up to the chamber housing the single bell, and although it is seldom rung these days, the bearings at either end of the spindle were well greased. By giving the drive-wheel a sudden turn, I sent one baritone chime booming out over the valley.

Up another level, and out through a pop-hole, I gained access to the roof inside the battlements. From there I could look out on level terms at two large pines, which I knew that inspector had marked down as a potential threat because, if they blow over in a westerly gale, they may crash into the tower.

Clanking home with my ladder, I felt sure he would raise our premium, which is already more than £500 a year, and a considerable burden for a parish with fewer than 20 households. But I see that we need to pay it – and after all those revelations, I am glad that we do.

THE INDEPENDENT

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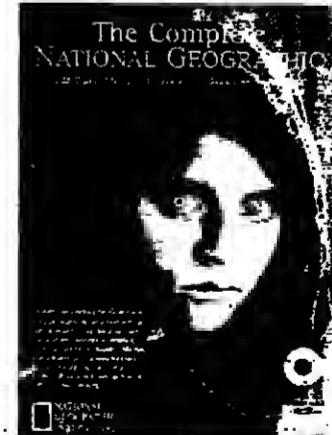
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Horticultural horoscope

Each sign of the zodiac has its associated plants. Naila Green lays down the lore on staying in synch with the heavens

Forget 1 January. For gardeners, the year is about to begin. The spring equinox is almost upon us and, as the days lengthen, the adrenalin flows. Foretelling the gardening year ahead and making planting plans are closely linked. While modern horoscopes may not offer much help, in old astrology books horticulture was prominent, and each star sign had its associated plants.

Pisces (20 February to 20 March): Water lily, fig and willow are Pisces plants. Willows are choice in winter, with the glowing orange-scarlet stems of *Salix alba* 'Britzensis'. In early spring, *Salix heterophylla* and the maroon-black of *G. phaeum* can appear. Thorns are also linked to Aries, the common hawthorn symbolising the onset of spring. *Crataegus x lavallei* is one of the best; it has spring blossoms, and orange berries in winter.

Aries (21 March to 20 April): Geranium, thistle, honeysuckle and witch hazel, all linked to Aries, tend not to flower this month, though on mild days the lilac-blue flowers of *Geranium malviflorum* and the maroon-black of *G. phaeum* can appear. Thorns are also linked to Aries, the common hawthorn symbolising the onset of spring. *Crataegus x lavallei* is one of the best; it has spring blossoms, and orange berries in winter.

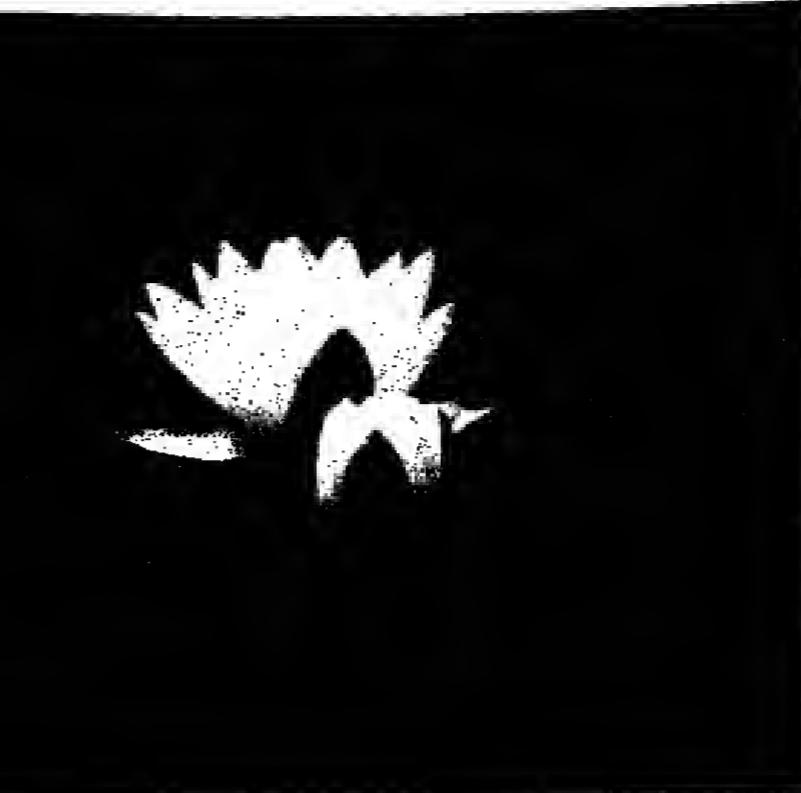
Taurus (21 April to 21 May): Taurus plants are rose, poppy, violet, foxglove, vine, ash, cypress and apple. The climbing rose 'Pompon de Paris' is especially early, and can be smothered with tiny pink flowers at the same time as ceanothus 'Puget Blue'. Clumps of the smoky-purple violet, *Viola labradorica* 'Purpurea', would complete the picture.

Gemini (22 May to 21 June): Lily of the valley, lavender, and nut trees are Gemini's plants. The sweet, lily-of-the-valley scent of *Convallaria majalis* 'Fortin's Giant' fills the garden at this time. The French lavender, *Lavandula stoechas*, also flowers now, with tiny heads of fragrant purple flowers topped by rose-purple bracts.

Cancer (22 June to 22 July): Acanthus is a Cancer plant, the most imposing variety being *Acanthus spinosus* with its mauve-purple flower spikes and huge, dissected and arching leaves. It thrives on poor soil, plenty of sun, and good drainage. Also associated with this sign are wild flowers, and trees rich in sap.

Leo (23 July to 23 August): Leo plants include sunflower, marigold, dahlia, rosemary, orange, bay, and palm. *Trachycarpus fortunei*, the chusan palm, is a striking, hardy palm with large, divided, fan-like leaves and sprays of fragrant, creamy-yellow flowers. Dahlias are good plants for Leo, as late summer sees the start of their flowering. One of the most popular and fashionable is 'Bishop of Llandaff', with bronze-green leaves and single, deep red flowers.

Virgo (24 August to 23 September): Virgo's plants are nut trees, and shrubs



with small, brightly-coloured flowers. An edible, decorative nut tree is the purple-leaved filbert, *Corylus maxima* 'Purpurea'. Purplish catkins with yellow anthers hang from bare branches in late winter.

Libra (24 September to 23 October): Blue flowers are linked with the sign of Libra, as are opulent roses, and vines. One of the more striking vines for the garden is *Vitis coignetiae*, which has large, heart-shaped leaves turning shades of crimson and scarlet in the autumn. Blue flowers are uncommon at this time of year, though in sheltered, south-facing

positions the hardy plumbago, *Ceratostigma willmottianum*, will bloom with its vibrant blue flowers from August until the first severe frosts come to wither its crimson leaves.

Scorpio (24 October to 22 November): Scorpio includes all plants with dark red flowers, blackthorn, and nut trees. Dark red flowers are uncommon this month, though leaves in that shade are plentiful. *Euonymus alatus* has an abundance of red leaves followed by small purple and red fruit. *Sedum maximum* 'Atropurpureum' has succulent, dark maroon foliage and red flower heads.

Sagittarius (23 November to 21 December): Plants for this star sign are pink, lime, mulberry, ash, oak, and birch. The birch tree is welcome for its silvery bark. Even better than the common silver birch is the whitewashed *Betula jacquemontii*, which shimmers in the frosty, pale winter sunlight. Plant it at the end of the garden, as a focal point and because it will, in time, reach 15 metres (50ft) in height.

Capricorn (22 December to 21 January): This is associated with Capricorn and, although common, *Hedera helix* 'Goldheart' can look stunning with *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', its bright red stems shining out like laser beams. Other Capricorn plants include pansy, hemlock, pine, willow, elm and poplar.

Aquarius (22 January to 19 February): Fruit and nut trees are associated with Aquarius, but can look dull. Not so the winter-flowering cherry, *Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis'. Although it is unable to fruit, its frosty white flowers shine like stars during mild winters. The contorted hazel, *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta', also unproductive, has twisted, bare stems with yellow catkins dangling like baubles on a Christmas tree.

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13/GARDENING

CUTTINGS

Robert Milne, who has 20 years of self-sufficient organic gardening behind him, is offering a kitchen garden design service. You decide what you want to grow. He sends a plan showing how it will all best fit in, and the best way to rotate the crops. He will also advise on (or undertake, if it is not too far from his base) the pruning of fruit trees. He is at 57 Foley Street, Hereford HR1 2SCQ (01432 279740).

Last week Brian Glover of London wrote in support of the rose 'Agnes' which he thought was treating unfairly. Karen Williams, of Great Bentley, Essex, feels the same way. "My 'Agnes' rose is about eight years old and is a great favourite," she writes. "It is too near a dead cedar and probably endures a poor soil, which I have done very little to improve. It also spends much of each day in shade. It seems to like these difficult conditions, although I admit it is not a very good-looking plant."

"But each year it has at least 20 beautiful flowers, and I like to cut them for the house, because the perfume is wonderful, a kind of spicy lemon, unlike the perfume of any other rose I have grown."

I began to feel I should not have dispatched my 'Agnes' to the bonfire, despite having waited 15 years in vain for a flower. I went to the place where it had been in the garden, to say sorry to its ghost. There, sprouting with massive insouciance, were four fat new suckers of the recalcitrant rose. It made me laugh. I feel that, like the Tamworth pigs, the rose has earned a reprieve. But whether the shock will now make it flower remains to be seen.

Do you make sourdough bread? Are you interested in your vinegar as you are in your olive oil? If yes, then you should get bold of the catalogue produced by Future Foods, which offers an extraordinary range of out-of-the-way things to grow. Sourdough "Tunnel Hill" comes highly recommended from California. It's a culture that makes bread rise, like yeast, but it works more slowly and breaks down carbohydrates in the flour to make bread more digestible. A starter kit costs £7.50.

Future Foods can also supply the fermenting culture that turns soybean or harley into Japanese miso. Japanese cooks make a wide range of misos by mixing spores of the fungus *Aspergillus oryzae* with cooked soybeans or grains of various kinds. This koji then continues with a secondary fermentation which turns it into miso, shoyu or tamari. Kits are £7.50 each.

The catalogue also includes a wide range of unusual vegetables and fruit: Chinese greens, serpent garlic, yams (must be kept frost free), saffron crocus, buckwheat, wineberries and other treats. For a copy, send £1 to Future Foods, PO Box 1564, Wedmore, Somerset BS24 4DP.

The English Gardening School will be running a one-day course on "down-to-earth gardening" on Monday 2 March (10.30am-3.30pm). Dr Lesley Rosser gives the lowdown on soil management, choice of plants, weed control and other practical matters. The day costs £70.50. For further information on this and other courses, contact the English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden, 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS (0171-352 4347).

Anna Pavord

Shoots to kill

Cutting new growth may seem drastic, writes Anna Pavord, but you've got to be cruel to be kind

If anybody mentions global warming to me again, I'll scream. After a stretch of the wettest and most unpleasant winter months I can remember for a long time - mud to the horizon - I think we deserved a couple of fine, warm days to remind ourselves why we ever thought we liked gardening. Valentine's weekend was a miracle. I don't care if we have to pay for it with late frosts in May, as the doomsday merchants predict. Last Saturday, I stood among the aconites spreadeagled in the sun, and sniffed like a truffle hound the smell of the viburnum on the other side of the path. "Yes!" I thought. "Here we go again."

It was such an extraordinary sensation, feeling the sun warm on my back, I could easily have frittered the whole day away. I lifted up snowdrops to look at the odd green punctuation marks on the inner petals. I admired the slaty, dark satin colours of the hellebores. I resolved, once again, to divide the blue primroses. But, although I tried hard to maintain the tunnel vision that is so essential in a gardener, it was horribly obvious that there was a vast backlog of work.

Much of it had to do with pruning. February is the time to tackle the later-flowering clematis and cut them down to within 18in of the ground. They won't die if you don't, but if you leave them to their own devices, they tend to flower in a bundle high up on the wall or support, leaving you to look into a bird's-nest tangle of bare stems.

If you have planted clematis to accompany a rose on a pergola, or against a wall, the rose itself will probably need pruning now, which, again, means you have to do something about the clematis. I certainly needed to do some work on the 'Constance Spry' rose planted on the south front of the house, which was tangled up with a vigorous *Clematis 'Jackmani Superba'*.

'Constance Spry' is usually described as a shrub rose, but it will easily get to 20ft if it has support. It was bred by David Austin in 1961, so in rose terms it is a new arrival, but it looks old, with big, cabbagey double flowers of a not-too-sickly pink. Austin calls it "myrrh-scented". I'd always wondered what myrrh smelt like.

The rose was doing wonders for any acrobat who happened to be hanging out of our attic window, but not much for anyone else. Fortunately the clematis was the type that responds to February pruning. I cut all its stems down first, although I felt like a murderer chucking away all the plump buds that were already springing up. Once the



clematis was out of the way, I could see more clearly what to do with the rose. Some of the longest growths had to be cut back to about 4ft.

Other stems I pulled down, arching them against the wall as near to horizontal as they would go. This brought the bulk of the rose down towards eye level. It will also persuade the stems to flower more freely than if they were vertical. Some roses are too stiff to treat like this, but 'Constance Spry' has relatively unctuous, pliable stems.

If *C. macrophylla* or *C. alpina* had been rambling through the 'Constance Spry' rose, the whole job would have been much trickier. Both of those clematis flower quite early, during April and May. They are already bursting with growth, and do not need regular pruning. It would have been difficult to restrain the rose without cutting back the clematis, but if it had been one of the early ones, we would have lost this season's flowering. You need to bear this in mind when you pair clematis with other climbers.

Clematis can be divided into three groups - early, mid- and late-season - which dictate whether or not they should be pruned. Early-flowering ones need no pruning, mid-season ones can be lightly pruned, late-flowering ones need cutting back hard, to within 18in of the ground.

But rules are made to be broken. If an early-flowering *Clematis montana* has got rampantly out of hand, as they sometimes do, then I would not hesitate to take the knife to it immediately. It had

finished flowering. Conversely, if I followed the rules then I would prune our yellow, September-flowering *Clematis orientalis* every year, but I don't. It does a good job of softening a bare stone wall, and does not get in the way of any other plants. So it's often left for five or six years before it is brought to heel. And rejuvenated.

That is another good reason for pruning. Young growths often flower better and with bigger flowers than old ones, which is why buddleia is usually pruned every year about now. No great thunderbolt will fall if you forget to tackle it, but the shrub, a coarse grower at the best of times, will get bigger than it deserves, and the long panicles of bloom will not be as showy as they should be.

Buddleia is difficult to kill, which is comforting to know when you are a new gardener cruising round it wondering where to plunge in the knife.

If it is an established bush, it will already have four or five main stems, all of which need to be cut hard back. There will usually be a bright, precocious bud, already breaking into leaf, to give you a lead. Cut above this, trusting it to zoom away as a strong new shoot.

Clematis Viticella 'Abundance'
Photograph: Howard Rice/
Garden Picture Library

Pruning has the effect of kick-starting plants into new growth and the general rule is to do it immediately a shrub has finished flowering. The ones that need attention now, though, are mostly those that flower in late summer. You don't prune them in autumn, because you don't want to encourage new growth that may be caught by frost. You leave them to tick over in winter, but prune them as early as you dare towards the beginning of spring. Then they have time to build up new flowering stems by summer.

Like buddleia, caryopteris flowers in August and September, so needs pruning soon. It is a compact shrub, rarely as much as 4ft high and wide, with greyish-green leaves and blue flowers, particularly good in the variety 'Wet Blue'. Cut the weakest, scraggiest stems out entirely at ground level and prune the other stems back hard, cutting just above a strong shoot. In severe winters, the top growth is often cut back by frost. Your "pruning" will in fact be clearing away wood that is already dead.

Hart pruning is what makes spiraea, such as *S. x bumalda* and *S. japonica*, perform most spectacularly in July and August. One of the best is 'Anthony Waterer', with leaves splashed with pink and cream among the flat, crimson flowers. For the biggest flowers, be brutal. Prune all the stems down to within 3in or 4in of the ground.

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A natural high

Strap on your crampons and practise your bum slides. Eric Kendall leads the way

The wind ripped at my body, the rain beat into my face and the storm howled around the surrounding peaks. For a terrifying moment, I thought I was in the opening paragraph of a travel piece on the perils of booking a trek with an operator who is not Abta-affiliated. In fact, I was just having a normal day out on a winter mountaineering course in the Western Highlands.

Winter in the hills promises unique thrills and challenges, but demands much more than summer walking. From December to April, you're almost bound to reach freezing conditions at some point up a mountain, even in Britain. It means that being on the hills rather than the valleys involves mountaineering skills, at least as a back-up, even if you think you're just going for "a walk". Snow, ice, and the potential for avalanches will all feature.

It can also mean stunning scenery and access to different (often more direct) routes to the peaks; with the right snow cover you can climb gullies which cascade with crumbling rock in summer. The motivation in winter is certainly different. "Because it's there" hardly applies. In bad conditions it's more "To see if it's there".

The key to winter mountaineering is good judgement and risk assessment, getting input from all the members of a group, not simply leaving decisions to an "expert". It's vital for everyone to remember that they're not in the SAS, and that the trip doesn't have to be either miserable or a near-death experience for it to be a successful outing. The basics are common sense. Even before you step outside in the morning, detailed weather forecasts are available by phone or fax, along with avalanche reports which can save a long hike into an unsuitable area. Not only is legwork minimised, but you're not exposed to the dangerous instinct to carry on regardless, which increases in direct proportion to the amount of effort you've put into getting there.

At the snow line, key skills training starts with ice arrests - lots of sliding wetly on your backside (beginner), head first on your front (intermediate) and head first flat on your back (advanced/suicidal). The theory is to initiate a fall on a slope, bringing yourself to a rapid halt by digging your axe into the snow. Get it wrong, and you risk neatly planting your axe while you continue on your way. To cope

with this eventuality you also practise the digging-your-hands-in technique, the alpine equivalent of a drowning man clutching at driftwood.

Next on the agenda is avalanche prediction. It's a huge subject, and well worth paying close attention to. Along with daily bulletins posted locally as a guide to conditions, there's also the obvious but often overlooked point that if you can see an avalanche, then the risk of more avalanches is high. Looking around you on the hill can tell you more than all the snow science ever written. Perhaps the most relevant thing to remember is that you yourself are the most likely trigger for any avalanche that may come your way.

For analysing specific slopes, and to warm up after ice-axe drill, the Rutschblock test is ideal. Lots of digging with spade, ski or ice-axe is involved, to isolate a representative section of a slope. Then you can determine the stability of the snow by progressively loading the block until it slides, which gives a reasonable impression of how the slope as a whole will react to your walking on it. On a scale of one to seven, one means run like hell - which would be tricky, as the snow is so prone to sliding that it collapses the moment you isolate the block from the surrounding slope. At the more reassuring end of the scale, a seven is so secure that even a yomping yeti couldn't budge it.

The final basic skill to learn is the use of crampons, which can be dangerous in the wrong hands and even more so on the wrong feet. Putting them on is half the battle, particularly in conditions where simply tightening your hood strings is an achievement. First crimped steps turn the world on its head. Suddenly sheet ice and hard-packed snow provide a rock-solid grip, while slabs of rock give a skittish feel. Crossing a rare patch of grass, Gary from Maidstone noticed that stomping around on crampons would also do an excellent job of aerating your lawn.

Basic ropework for tougher terrain or lowering down steep faces, using ice-axe belays and snow bollards, is a further aspect of moving safely around the mountains, though, for much of the time, winter walking and mountaineering is unprotected, relying on increasing care in relation to the degree of exposure. Do look down, not to give yourself an attack of vertigo, but so that you realise the stakes are about

as high as you are. And for anyone who thinks all this is just about the serious matter of getting to the top, that's only half the story. Coming down the other side can be at least as demanding, but if you're lucky, it may afford an ice-axe-controlled bum-slide that makes the Cresta Run look like a walk in the park.

Where to learn, and what you need

The National Mountain Centre, Ples Y Brenin (01690 720214) offers some of the best training facilities and instruction available. They run winter courses in Wales, Scotland and the Alps. Comprehensive notes are supplied which detail experience needed and equipment required; in many cases gear is available on loan. The Scottish National Sports Centre, Glenmore Lodge (01479 861256) offers a similar programme based at Aviemore.

What you take into the mountains is fundamental to your comfort and safety. Protective clothing doesn't have to be Gore-Tex, though many manufacturers use this fabric for their top-of-the-range gear. Most important are the design and fit of the garments. Lowe Alpine use their own breathable fabric, Triplepoint Ceramic, and Paragon clothing relies on regular treatment of non-waterproof fabrics for optimum breathability and water-resistance.

Boots need to be both water-resistant and suitable for use with crampons. Plastic shelled boots are frequently used, but tend to be uncomfortable if worn day in, day out. Salomon now produce leather mountaineering boots (the Super Mountain range) which include lots of innovations, derived in part from their ski-boot experience. A boot which sprouts crampons from the sole unit at the touch of a button (after Rosa Kleb in *From Russia With Love*) is keenly awaited.

For both clothing and specialist climbing hardware, the best advice is available from your instructors, and specialist retailers such as Cotswold Outdoor (01285 643434). Half the fun of winter mountaineering is in gratifying pent-up gear lust. But keep in mind more mundane equipment, such as gloves. We wondered, for several soggy, cold hours, why our instructors had a minimum of four pairs, until we realised that no one, other than Marigold, has managed to produce finger-bags that keep the water out for long.



Rich pickings: winter climbing is all about being prepared

Photograph: Eric Kendall

GAMES

STATISTICALLY INSIGNIFICANT WILLIAM HARTSTON

Do you spend eight hours and 42 minutes sleeping every day? Do you watch the television for about two hours and 33 minutes, and spend an hour eating at home, another hour socialising, and between 40 and 50 minutes on your personal care?

If all of these apply to you, then you are absolutely average according to the latest edition of *Social Trends*, that indispensable manual from the Office of National Statistics. But the true fascination of this document lies not in the raw figures of the individual tables of what percentage of which age group of which gender spends how long doing what. The real insights come only when you compare the figures in these tables with each other, and with other surveys that have been done in the past year.

Last year, for example, one survey found that 3 per cent of the population bath only once a week, while another totally different survey revealed that 3 per cent of married women are in love with someone other than their husbands. Quite obviously, though nobody ever pointed it out, those are the women married to the men who bat only once a week.

To take another example, 14 per cent of women, given one wish, would wish to have the housework

magically done for them. And 14 per cent of adult males have cycled in the past four weeks. They probably got on their bikes to avoid having to help their wives with the housework. That picture is sadly confirmed by the statistic of 14 per cent of fatal accidents that involve drunk drivers: it's surely those 14 per cent of women taking to drink at the prospect of all that housework their husbands won't help them with, then getting in the car and running him down on his bike.

Only last week there was a Valentine's Day survey commissioned by Durex which found that not only do cohabiting couples make love more often than married ones, but they spend longer over it. The precise annual figures were 135 times at 16 minutes a time for married couples and 175 times at 25 minutes each for cohabitantes. That's 36 hours a year married love-making and 72 hours 55 minutes unmarried. That's a difference of 36 hours and 55 minutes. And what is 36 hours and 55 minutes? It is, as a detailed study of *Social Trends* reveals, exactly the length of working time needed for a married couple with husband only working to earn enough to pay for two road fund licences and a pint of milk. This poor man's drunken, ungrateful spouse - 20 per

cent of whose conceptions have ended in abortion. I might add - has hastily drunk a bottle of milk to try to sober up, then got in her car, for which he paid the road tax, and mercilessly runs him down just because he's too exhausted to help with the washing up. And even if he was one of the 10 per cent who sometimes do the ironing, you can be pretty sure that she'd be one of the 10 per cent who find that it improves her sex life to imagine that she's with somebody else. Probably the ironing males are none other than the 10 per cent who have a female boss.

With all this evident disarray around, is it that 58 per cent, in the Durex survey, reported that their sex lives are good or excellent? Once again, the answer lies in a deeper analysis of the figures. For 58 per cent pay cash for their Christmas shopping, 58 per cent of mothers would rather spend Christmas Day at home than on a beach in Australia, and 58 per cent of 8- to 10-year-olds think people look good with a tan. It all adds up to such a sorry picture of rich fathers taking children on holiday to lie in the sun in Australia over Christmas, leaving wives at home to do the housework, while they have good or excellent sex with Antipodean beauties. Bastards! Running over's too good for them, I say.

PANDORA MELLY GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Richard Neave, 61, medical artist

I am not a joiner of clubs, or a player of games with other people. I tend to be more solitary, as I'm not very good at ball-games.

Ever since I can remember, I've enjoyed making things. I grew up on a little farm in Sussex, and I didn't have much in the way of toys. But I liked playing with water and I'd make dams and little water-wheels that worked, and boats.

I've always liked the vision of a model boat chugging across a pond. There is something rather romantic and lovely about the idea of a thing by itself in the middle of the water with its little engine, preferably in the half-light.

I still like building and playing with model boats. Sometimes they're built out of wood; sometimes they're kits modified. The trouble is I don't have that much time, but I like just to be able to settle down and work at it for half a day every few months.

Making things is the game, and I suppose remaking a face is the same sort of

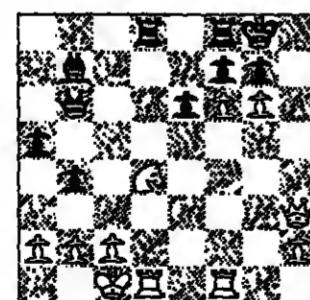
thing. It's all about construction, or knowing how things fit together. As a child, whenever I found a fox skull, or a rabbit's skull, I'd always pick it up and look at it to see how it went.

I suppose this is where the business of people-watching comes in. You can stand in the Underground and count the number of people with adherent earlobes and well-defined filtrums, or whatever.

This game does have its problems, because you can offend people by staring at them. It is an extremely invasive thing to do, but I have a professional interest. Rather like an architect looking at another architect's building and thinking: "That's nice, but the pointing is a bit rough."

If you have missed the "Meet the Ancestors" series on BBC2, on which Richard Neave reconstructed British skulls, you may catch up by reading "Making Faces" by Richard Neave and John Pring (British Museum Press, £18.99). Your filum is the groove down the middle of your upper lip.

CHESS: WILLIAM HARTSTON



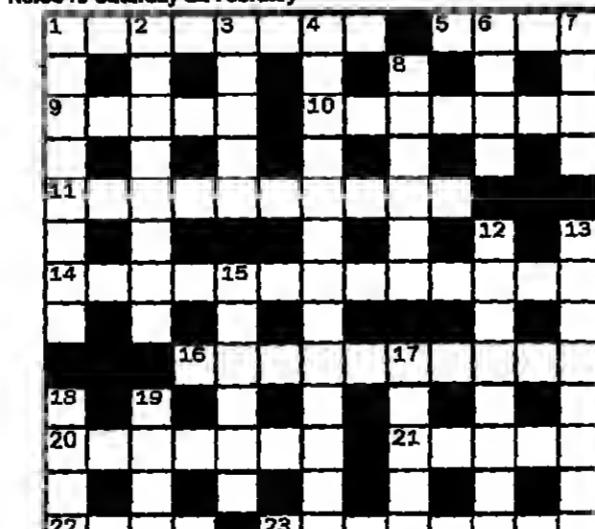
White: V Anand
Black: K Novev

1 e4 c5 14 f4 b4
2 Nf3 c6 15 Ne2 a5
3 d4 cxd4 16 Nb4 Nxd4
4 Nxd4 a6 17 Nxd4 Qb6
5 Bd3 Bc5 18 e5 Bb7
6 Nb3 Ba7 19 Rh1 dxe5
7 Nc3 Nc6 20 fxe5 Rdf8
8 Qe2 d6 21 Bxd7+ Kxb7
9 Be3 Bxe3 22 g6+ Kg8
10 Qxe3 Nf6 23 Qb3 Nf6
11 g4 24 fxe5 fxe5
12 0-0-0 0-0 25 fxg7 resigns
13 g5 Ne8

"The following day," Anand writes, "I was facing Agdestein" (who was the highest-rated player in the event). "I prepared as well as I could... and sat down hoping to play a good game." Not "hoping to win", note, but "hoping to play a good game".

CONCISE CROSSWORD

No.3540 Saturday 21 February



ACROSS

- 1 Scottish clan (8)
- 5 Oil reservoir (4)
- 9 Notice of intention to marry (5)
- 10 Tending the sick (7)
- 11 First-rate quality (10)
- 14 Life story (13)
- 16 TV programmes (4,6)
- 20 Well-liked (7)
- 21 Twist and squeeze moisture from (5)
- 22 Ship's complement (4)
- 23 OK (3,5)

DOWN

- 1 Mountain transport (5-3)
- 2 Tailless domestic animals (4,4)
- 3 Herb (5)
- 4 NCO (5-8)
- 6 Component (4)
- 7 Bride's attendant (4)
- 8 Shopkeeper (6)
- 12 Fair to one's opponents (8)
- 13 Vision (8)
- 15 Protection from rain (coll.) (6)
- 17 Military potential (5)
- 18 Long poem (4)
- 19 Church architectural feature (4)

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:
ACROSS: 1 Somme, 4 Fin (Something), 7 Clem, 8 Dredger, 9 Long-drawn-out, 10 Usurer, 13 Litter, 15 Bloodthirsty, 19 Gertrude, 20 Omit, 21 Tol, 22 Salmon, 23 Lawyer, 24 Manager, 3 Elder, 4 Faldo, 5 Necktie, 6 Trowel, 11 Subject, 12 Radius, 14 Turnmill, 16 Octet, 17 Herds, 18 Trial.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

Game alt; dealer South

North
♦8 6
♥Q 10 5
♦10 7 6 3
♣K 8 6 5

West
♦A 10 9 4
♥9 7 2
♦8 5 2
♣7 4 3

South
♠K Q J 5
♥A K J
♦K Q J
♣J 10 9

Ob dear! I shall have to give up offering well-meant advice and stick strictly to reporting facts. This deal produced a peevish letter from a correspondent.

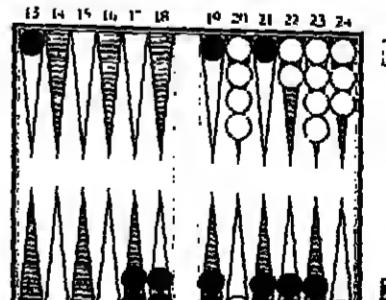
The bidding was simple: South opened 2NT and North raised to game. West led ♦4 against 3NT, obviously following my recent suggestion that the lead of a 10 against a no-trump contract implied a strong suit with two higher honours. Dummy followed with the six, and East (who had clearly noted my other recent point that, rather than make an apparently useless attempt with near garbage in partner's suit, it was more useful to give a count) thoughtfully played the two to suggest a three-card holding.

When ♦6 won, declarer still had two guards in spades and he attacked clubs. Now it was too late for the defenders to get a long card in any suit working and they came to only the four obvious tricks: a spade, a diamond and two clubs.

Yes, the lead of ♦10 defeats the contract when West ducks his partner's next spade return. Yes, East could have done everything that was necessary by covering S6 with his seven at trick one after which, again, West ducks the next spade return.

But the real culprit of the hand was declarer! Why? He really should have tried ♦8 from dummy at trick one - a play that could hardly cost and would have provided an unexpected third stopper in spades.

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY



This was problem two in the Christmas Quiz. Black to play 42. Should he play: (a) 19/13 (b) 21/15 (c) 7/5*1* (d) 7/5*, 13/9?

Firstly, let's check the position of the doubling cube. Black has already doubled and therefore cannot win the game by doubling White out. This normally means that Black should play more aggressively than if the cube were in the middle.

What of our four candidate plays? We can quickly eliminate play (d). If it is right to hit it will be right to hit two men, because there will be fewer return shots and because it will lead to winning more gammons. Of the two more passive plays 19/13 is safer but provides less control of the outer boards. However, getting hit 19/13 to be superior. So we are down to two plays, the attacking play (c), or the passive play (a). Which is right?

The answer is play (c) and it's not even close. Unless White rolls an immediate 1 or double-5 he is likely to end up with two men closed out which in turn lead to quite a few gammon losses. If White does roll a 1 then Black is certainly in some danger but both players will have a man on the bar against a 4-point board and it will be Black's turn to roll, still making him a small favourite. On the 24 rolls where White doesn't roll a 1 or 55, Black will become a massive favourite.

Having given the cube away this is exactly the sort of move Black should be looking for to bring the game to a swift conclusion. Sadly when confronted with this problem over the board, I played the weak 19/13 and was gammoned for my pusillanimity.

15/OUTDOOR

First the wine, then the party

The best way to learn which wine goes with which food is by making an occasion of it, writes Sally Staples

At the end of a busy day in the office, only the stout-hearted, or those on a strict diet, may be able to face the rigours of going straight off to evening class to broaden their minds. But some courses designed to widen horizons are set in a convivial atmosphere, round a large table laden with food and wine. And this isn't just one that teaches how to match different wines with food. It combines learning something useful with unwinding at the end of the day, and you don't have to think about cooking dinner afterwards.

Most of the students I met were young business women who wanted to be more adventurous when buying wine to complement their cooking, or needed to know more about selecting wine when planning to entertain clients.

Among the few men sipping and sampling was a ship broker, Jonathan, who said he was embarrassed that he always had to hand the wine list to his guest when taking clients out to lunch. "I wanted to know more about what wines went with what food, and this course does just that," he said. "It's a relaxed and informal way of learning what I need to know."

The tutor, Jackie Graves, asks the class to bring their own tasting glasses to the venue, at Westminster City School in London, and she suggests they refrain from eating spicy food at lunch time, as this impairs the palate. She begins by offering three wines for the students to taste.

On the night I visited, these were chablis premier cru, sauvignon and chianti classico – all bought from Wine Rack at £7.99 a bottle. Everyone was given a tasting sheet and invited to write down their opinion of the wine's appearance, bouquet and taste. The emphasis is not on what is right or wrong, but on what they feel like.

"The course is for people who don't know much about wine and want to learn more," said Jackie. "We deal with wines whose names they will have come across in restaurants, and the idea is to let them explore tastes for themselves, rather than stipulate that specific wines must go with certain dishes."

Confidence visibly grew with each sip, and even the quieter members of the group started volunteering views about the flavour of gooseberries, hints of spices, or an oily, buttery texture.

Once each wine had been tasted and assessed, Jackie produced paper plates and plastic cutlery and started handing out food. First came avocado vinaigrette. Everyone was asked to taste each wine and write down which one best complemented the dish. Next was avocado with a prawn mayonnaise sauce, then cold lemon chicken, then plain roast chicken with sage and onion stuffing, and finally a garlicky duck pâté. With six bottles of wine between a dozen tasters, and plenty of food on the table, the class developed like a dinner party, with everyone joining in the discussion.

Elmar, an accountant, had signed up for the course with her flatmates, insurance broker Deborah, and Angela who works for a software company.

"I had been to wine tastings before, but it takes a difference when you are tasting food at the same time," said Elmar. "I eat out quite lot and it makes it more interesting to know something about the wine you are drinking, also, we all cook in the flat and it's fun to learn more about the wine we buy."

Across the table was Carlos, from Spain, who works in the catering industry and wants to be a sommelier.

Another taster with ambitions for a career in cooking was 24-year-old Emma, from Essex.

"I used to do home economics. I love cooking and I can eat a lot, so this course really suits me. Another reason I came is that I heard that loads of men come on it, and you get asked out afterwards. I suppose that's why here are so many women here – they're all married," she said with a rueful grin.

Jackie prefaced the evening with a run-down on each wine sampled, so students can learn that chablis is made from the chardonnay grape and sauvignon from the sauvignon blanc variety. She warned against buying a cheap £4 bottle of chablis, and urged her students to go only for the premier cru. The next week's session was to include German riesling, flûte and fleurie, to be tasted with goats' cheese, Parma ham and melon, lobster pâté, roast pork, and pork and mushroom meat loaf. In other sessions, Jackie will deal with pudding wines.

At the end of the evening a vote was taken on which wine best matched each dish. Jackie gave her view, but occasionally she may be outvoted by her students. It may not be traditional, but in 1998, if you prefer a chianti with avocado vinaigrette, or a chablis with sage and onion stuffing – that's fine.

The six-week course costs between £27 and £33, plus a £50 fee for the food and wine. There are also courses on French wine appreciation. Both are run by Westminster Adult Education Services (0171-286 1900). Jackie Graves also offers classes for wine studies and the World of Wine certificate course at Kensington and Chelsea College (0171-573 5333).



Off the rails: a wider, wilder view of Kent, above; the coast at Deal, below

Photograph: John Voos

White cliffs and bovver boots



Matthew Brace continues his series on great short railway journeys with a trip through the seamy side of Kent



In contrast to the other train journeys in this series, this week's route presents the armchair traveller with the grittier side of life in Britain. No one would argue that this trip is picturesque, though it does open up part of the South-east that is definitely not on the tourist track. To add to your woes, you will have to change trains at Ramsgate in order to complete the trial to our journey's end at Margate.

The trip starts handsomely enough, with the white cliffs of Folkestone and Dover standing proudly in the sunlight. They are so quintessentially English, they almost make homecoming ferry passengers burst into choruses of "Land of Hope and Glory" as they arrive from the Continent. Taking a train journey along this famous coast, however, you realise that the celebrated cliffs are not as high and mighty as they sometimes seem.

Leaving Folkestone en route to Dover, the train bows along next to the Channel shore, with France visible on a clear day. The cliffs rising to the landward side looked only about 100ft high, a fraction of the height they appear from out at sea. Along the track, big chunks of chalk have become

dislodged and are propped up against wire mesh fences where they lie looking bizarrely like blocks of feta cheese.

For a coastal route, this short train journey offers surprisingly few sea views. You can see the waves as you approach the impressive bulk of Dover Castle, but they soon disappear behind the rooftops of the town. Instead, the track winds inland through tunnels cut into the chalk.

Most of Kent is cosy, characterised by castles and small villages, but the landscape on this extreme eastern edge is uncharacteristically flat and deserted. It is more akin to the countryside across the Channel. Anyone who has travelled on the Eurostar to Paris will have noticed the difference between the relatively cluttered appearance of central Kent, with its hedges, fields and settlements, and the vast, uninhabited expanses of Normandy. If the Eurostar followed this route through the east of the county before submerging, passengers would get a much better idea of the sort of scenery to expect in France.

Martin Mill is the first station past Dover, after

which the train runs through wide, chalky fields. Earlier this week, spring was waiting in the wings: buds looked almost ready to burst, the smell of early blossoms filled the air and seagulls were sunbathing in the warm, coastal light. Children at a small gypsy encampment stopped hanging out the family washing and waved at us as we passed.

From the train you do not see much of the small town of Walmer, other than modern, brutal-looking housing estates. But Walmer is well worth noting, for it has a significant place in history: this was where Julius Caesar is believed to have stepped on British soil for the first time.

After the station here, the train heads for Deal, where sheep graze on rugby pitches in the town centre, and then on to Sandwich, through more flat fields. Sandwich has a pretty church and clapperboard houses, common in this part of Britain, and a whitewashed windmill on the outskirts of town. Farther down the line is its modern equivalent, a wind turbine.

The train from Folkestone and Dover ends at Ramsgate where you must change platforms and

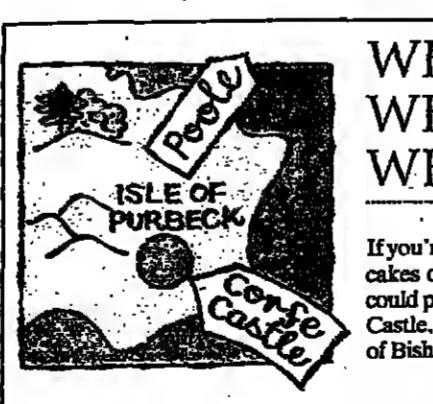
catch a London train that starts here and heads for Victoria station. It was appropriate that I found myself squeezed in among a group of middle-aged, overweight football fans heading for a London derby between Arsenal and Chelsea. This part of Kent has often been described as being Cockneyed beyond all recognition. "It was all right before it got full of London scum," I later overheard one native Margate resident say.

The fans talked about how well the "boys" would do, and whether they would get to Wembley this year – and they scolded a younger member of the group for not bringing enough bags of crisps to munch. They were harmless enough, but I was glad I met them as they were cracking open their first cans of beer, and not as they were coming home later that night. They chatted through Broadstairs, once home to Charles Dickens, and into Margate, where I got off and left them to it.

It is a long time since people came to Margate for health reasons. A sea-bathing infirmary was established here in the 18th century, when it was widely thought that salt water was good for the body – both for bathing in and for drinking. Since then Margate has developed a different, and offputting, reputation. During the Seventies and Eighties it was the battlefield for many a skinhead scrap, and today it still has an air of tension and violence.

After a bag of chips, a stroll through Margate's dirty streets and a swift pint in a run-down pub where former addicts were comparing hard drug substitutes while their children played under the tables, I ran for the next train. This is a part of Kent tourists do not usually see, and now I know why.

On the footplate
When to go: trains run about once an hour and the journey takes half-an-hour.
Who to call: National Rail Enquiries 0345 484950
How much: adult day return £6.10, children (under 16) day return £3.05
What to see: hop off at Broadstairs to look at Dickens's house



WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

If you're not busy flipping pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, you could pop in to the Fox in Corfe Castle, Dorset, and have a pint of Bishop's Tipple with the apprentices of the Purbeck Marlbers and Stonemasons. Join them at midday as they wait to be admitted to the ancient order. After a ceremony that involves a penny loaf and a peppercorn, the Marlbers play a game of football to celebrate their right to transport stone from the Purbeck quarries to Poole. 24 Feb, The Fox, Corfe Castle, Dorset. Tel: 01929 480449. Sally Kindberg

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PHOTOGRAPHS
BY
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Trinidad's exotic panorama of cricket classics

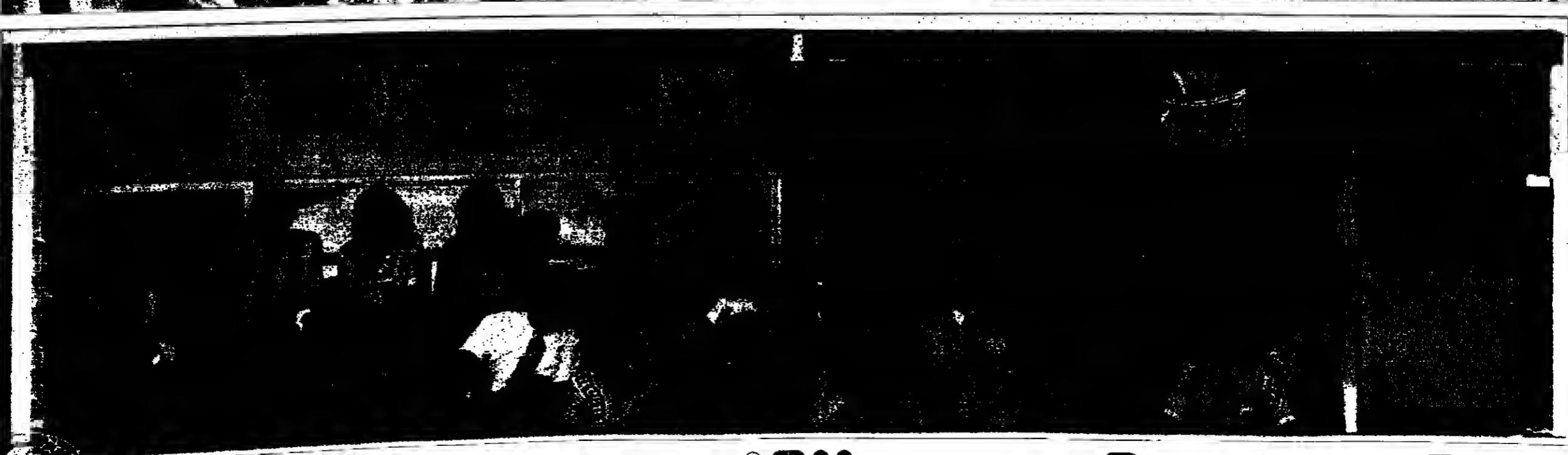
Over the last fortnight the picturesque panorama of the Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, Trinidad, has provided the backdrop to two of the most compelling Test matches of modern times, which more than made up for the fiasco in Kingston.

From the enthralled observers of the President's Box (bottom) to a noisy crowd where the umbrella was the ultimate accoutrement – being useful against both sun and rain – the atmosphere was always good-humoured despite the tension of both games. Even the toss seemed to be fun and there could be no more appropriate antidote for the anxious appetite than hot roti – a fantastic farrago of fried meat or vegetables and potato wrapped in bread.

One of England's most memorable moments in the second Test was the dismissal of the West Indies captain, Brian Lara, caught by Michael Atherton (right) off Angus Fraser in the first innings. England's most successful bowler in the Caribbean now seems to be universally known as "the old warhorse" and his stock in trade, apart from accuracy, is a peculiar hangdog expression which is best seen when runs are being scored off him (left).

When the dust settled, the series was level at 1-1, with all to play for as the Caribbean carnival moves on to Georgetown, Guyana, for the fourth Test, which starts on Friday 27 February.

● Copies of these photographs – and any others by the Independent and Independent on Sunday photographers David Ashdown, Peter Jay and Robert Hallam – can be ordered by telephoning 0171 293 2534.



hem

Has the banker got a hero's heart?

Cheltenham is less than a month away and the Irish have their cash ready to pile on this year's certainty. Richard Edmondson reports

THERE are priests and prostitutes at the Cheltenham Festival, but the profession which most interests the visiting Irish is the banker, and that does not mean the plutocrats from the City.

The Irish banker is in fact a horse which appears at Cheltenham every 12 months. If it loses it is tremendous news for the bookmakers. If it wins it is tremendous news for just about everyone else, the thousands that back it and the service industries of Cotswolds restaurants, hotels and watering holes that meet their every need. The people who attend in addition to the priests probably do better business as well.

The burden of stimulating the Gloucestershire economy in under four weeks' time at National Hunt racing's fiesta will fall on a white-faced horse admirably built for carrying such a load. Florida Pearl looks as though he belongs in a circus, albeit not under a spangled acrobat but rather as part of the elephant troupe.

The six-year-old is a massive horse with a similar reputation and if his unbeaten record is arrested in the Royal Sun Alliance Novices' Chase the fates in the stands will be longer than a gasman's mackintosh.

Florida Pearl is trained by Willie Mullins in the Daneli country of Co Carlow by Willie Mullins. Willie knows what it is like to win at the Festival as both jockey and trainer, and, most of all, he knows what it is like to be supervising a national treasure. He was assistant to his father Paddy during the incredible years of "The Mare". Dawn Run reached such celebrity that like "Himself" before her, she became recognised by the simplest of epithets.

Florida Pearl could not be more different from her in temperament. "Everyone that comes to the yard wants to see him and he's such a lovely laid-back horse that he smells and nuzzles them and everything," Mullins says. "Dawn Run was completely different. It was a job even to get her box and even then you could do it only on her terms. Once you were in there she'd keep her eyes on you all the time so you had to be careful."

Indeed, they still talk at Donnington of the day Dawn Run kicked a vet square in the chest as he was trying to administer an injection. Everyone who saw the medics travelling through

an expansive parabola felt sure he would land dead until the loop ended in a pile of straw.

Florida Pearl has already proved he is good by handing out several thrashings. Now connections are hoping that, like Dawn Run, he will also show the great courage that only the finest possess. "You get plenty of horses who can show you speed and go past another, but not so many who can come back when another comes at them," Mullins says. "And then there's the very few who keep coming back two or three times against the very best horses. You need that heart that Dawn Run had. Defeat wasn't in her vocabulary and I'm just hoping he's going to be the same."

Willie Mullins was riding an Irish track while still under the tutelage of Cistercian monks at boarding school. His first contact with Cheltenham glory came when Hazy Dawn won the National Hunt Chase in 1982. Roy Daniels, the country singer and mare's owner, celebrated by warbling through Danny Boy in the unsaddling enclosure.

That day, St Patrick's Day, is said to be the only occasion that Paddy Mullins, Hazy Dawn's trainer, has ever shown emotion at the racecourse. It was the first time one of his offspring had partnered a Festival winner.

Two years later, and the day after Dawn Run had won the Champion Hurdle, Willie Mullins won the National Hunt Chase again with Macks Friendly. It was an afternoon when the jockey wondered if he had overdone the partying the night before.

The six-times amateur champion is perhaps most famous for the two distinct orbits he used to take around the racecourse, either a Mercury or a Pluto but nothing in between. In winning the 1983 Foxhunters at Liverpool on Atha Cliath he piloted a course so tight that his

boots were scoured with paint on his return. Yet in soft ground in particular, a favoured Mullins tactic was to go right round the outside in search of better going. Sometimes it worked, but other times they had to go out looking for him with torches.

However, by the time he had partnered Wither Or Which to success in the Festival humper two years ago the infatuation was disappearing. "I was getting off horses still concentrating on the race and not able to communicate properly with the owners," Mullins says. "By the

fore. As he swung into the straight on Macks Friendly he could not see the final fence and initially believed he had strayed on the hurdles course. Only when the last obstacle appeared out of the shadow of the stands did the self-admonishment stop.

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19/RACING

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Punters' Guide

HYPERION'S

TV TIPS

WARWICK

3.16: WINN'S PRIDE was 44 lengths behind the winner when sixth of 12 runners at Uttoxeter's fortnight ago – hardly encouraging form. But the ground was testing then compared to the fast surface forecast today. Reg Hollinshead's Flat runners have hit form of late. Village King has form in the mud, but his trainer says this five-year-old acts even better on firm ground and he is the danger.

3.17: ROYAL ANGELS seeks a fifth timer here and cannot be ruled out after gamely holding off all challengers in a decent effort at Uttoxeter last time. SPLENDID THYNE, though, is classier and tools capable of giving 12lb to the locally trained bottom weight.

3.18: A ST Tennessee Twist could end the burden of top weight here but an absence of over a year raises doubt. Ossendaw had previous proved capable of finding more at the finish, but may could play into the trip on this demanding track. Tom Samuels, in contrast, is likely to be staying on best of all. OTTOWA has the best credentials however. When winning at Uttoxeter a fortnight ago he had leading Grand National candidate Him Of Praise back in third.

3.19: ADDINGTON BOY AND SPARKY GAYLE are refugees from chasing, but while the former is using this as a prep for the Cheltenham Gold Cup, the selection, who acts on this ground, is attempting to establish his reputation.

3.20: INDIAN ARROW, on his latest run 12-year-old Dublin Flyer hit back at claims that he is on the downgrade by putting up his best display so far this season with a third to Papillon at Cheltenham. He has been dropped 7lb since, and the younger SENOR EL BETRUTTI, up 8lb since his last run in a handicap, will need to be on his mettle.

3.21: POLITICAL TOWER is consistent and quite capable of coping with lively ground. Blue Charm is improving and looks the danger.

Chepstow

1.15 MUSKHILL 3.15 Golden Eagle
2.15 Splendid Thyme 3.45 Escarteguerie
2.45 WITH IMPURITY (map) 4.15 Good Lord Murphy

GOING: Good to soft (good in places).
● Left-hand, undulating course with stiff fences.
● Course is on A486, Chepstow road (Cardiff - Gloucester line) in. ADMISSION: Club N £10. Trainer-David 20-11; P. Nichols 16-79 (22%).
● LEADING JOCKEYS: A P McCoy 22-1; P Nichols 16-79 (22%).
● FAVOURITES: 166 wins in 582 races (40%). R Johnson 12-59 (23%).
BLINKED FIRST TIMES: None.

1.15 PERSIAN WAR PREMIER NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS A) £15,000 added 2m 4f 110yds BBC1

1 2/301 BRACEY RUM (28) Doublet 0 11 6... R Williamson
2 3/4-1 CALDON LAN (25) (B) Kinsale 0 11 6... R Williamson
3 0/121 IRANCO (25) (B) Kinsale 0 11 6... R Williamson
4 1-31 KING ON THE RUN (25) (C) Lady Hesketh 0 11 6... R Thornton
5 1-11 KINGS MEASURE (25) (D) Mr Blackett 0 11 6... R Thornton
6 0/121 MUSKHILL (25) (D) J Eddery 0 11 6... R Callaghan
7 14-21 RED CURATE (12) (B) Mr C Wheal G McCourt 7 11 6... R Williamson
8 12/41 SCORING PEDIGREE (12) (B) Mr Blackett 0 11 6... A Thornton
9 22R-1 STRONG TEL (14) (CD) Goffe Hall 0 11 6... J Lower
10 34/21 BORAZON (15) (B) Mrs & Miss J Broachell 0 11 6... C Llewellyn
11 0/43 WESLEY'S LAD (22) (D) Mr Blackett 0 11 6... D Barrell
12 1-12 RED CURATE (12) (B) Mr C Wheal G McCourt 7 11 6... R Williamson
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Mixer fighting off loneliness of leadership

THE ENGLAND captain has more important things on his mind – the tender state of his battered rib-cage, for starters – but he soldiers on like a seasoned showbiz troubadour, dazzling and dazzling his way through a 15-minute press conference and a dozen separate television and radio interviews.

He presses the flesh and delivers his soundbites with customary poise but to the acute observer, he is microscopically moodier than usual. Everybody wants a piece of Lawrence Dallaglio these days and just occasionally, he wishes they would find someone else's bones to pick.

Twenty-four hours later, he is back on Planet Positive. He has survived what he describes as a "fiery little contact session" under the unforgiving gaze of John Mitchell, the assistant England coach. His ribs have been tested to the limit and passed muster. "No reaction at all," he says. "And if there was ever a session that would have caused a reaction, that was it. Ever since we left Paris, John has been telling us how soft we are. I think we're a hit harder now."

Like most rugby types, Dallaglio far prefers playing a good game to talking one; ask him whether he would rather answer seven questions about today's England-Wales match at Twickenham or have seven bells knocked out of him in training and he would take rather less than a nano-second to give you his reply. "I enjoy playing ball on a Saturday afternoon," he says. "It's that simple. Don't even ask me how I feel, sitting around on the sidelines watching Wasps lose at Bath last week. I do not like missing matches, period."

But life is not that simple for an England captain, as Dallaglio readily accepts. It is a solitary role, a one-man epic played out in the full view of the mob and while the latest star turn shows no sign of falling prey to the demonic insecurities that so exhausted his immediate predecessors – Will Carling, the Hamlet miscast as hero, and Phil de Glanville, the natural leader betrayed by a catastrophic dip in form – he is fully

In his brief career as the England captain, Lawrence Dallaglio has yet to lead his side to victory. But, as he told Chris Hewett, he remains a firm believer in long-termism

aware of the minefield he now

camaraderie, the musketeerish "all for one, one for all" ethic – will be under all sorts of strain if Wales, boisterous and buoyant under the bright new stewardship of Rob Howley, manage to sack Twickenham for the first time in a decade this afternoon.

It is not something Dallaglio expects to happen, not by a very long chalk, but he is at pains to emphasise that the building of Clive Woodward's New England is likely to take months, maybe even a year or two, rather than weeks.

"I can quite understand people – the supporters, especially, but also some of the players in this squad – who want things to happen quickly. Christ knows, I'm like it myself; I want to be the best, I want to beat everyone every day of the week and when things don't work out, I'm the first to give it the 'Why, why, why?' routine. I'm not the most naturally patient person in the world, to be honest."

"But this is a serious business we're involved in here and it just doesn't come to you overnight. You do your level best, you take stock, you tweak and twist things here and there and you go again. Above all, you listen to advice. The ability to listen is the greatest attribute you can have as an ambitious sportsman."

"When you're England captain, of course, everyone under the sun has a piece of advice for you and I understand that. You can turn a deaf ear, of course, and be dismissive to people. But the art of it is to digest what is being said, pick out the nuggets and throw the rest overboard. No-one knows it all in this game; not me, not the coaches, not even the bloody All Blacks, although they probably know more than most. Once you stop listening, you may as well go and do something else."

Not only does Dallaglio listen, both to Woodward and his coaching team and carefully selected advisers outside the narrow confines of the national squad, but he studies as well. He investigates the dynamics of

sporting excellence in whatever manifestation he happens to find it and every time he discovers a "little gem of information", he works out a way of modifying it for his own purposes.

"What fascinates me is the secret of maintaining peak performance over a long period of time and it seems to me that the key to consistent success lies internally rather externally. The heat put pressure on themselves; they set their own standards and they keep at it, night and day, until they meet them. And then what do they do? They set new standards. It never ends, no matter what they may achieve."

"In rugby, I don't look much further than New Zealand as a model outfit. But I'm also intrigued by the Chicago Bulls, the Williams Formula One team, some of the yachtsmen who prove themselves time and again in incredibly difficult circumstances. What these people have in common is a drive from within. They're implacable in their pursuit of excellence and that's how I want to see this England team develop."

"We've got the talent in this country and we're pretty well looked after in terms of resources but there are certain differences, tiny but absolutely crucial, between ourselves and the real high-achievers. That is why the 26-all draw with the All Blacks before Christmas was of

more use to us than a win, which would have given us a false impression of where we were at."

"It didn't take me very long in Paris a fortnight ago to realise we were going to have a bad day. It was fairly clear, right from the outset, that something was wrong in our collective psychology. Do the All Blacks ever feel that? And if they do, how do they go about dealing with it in such a way as to win a game they really ought to lose? That's what we have to discover and it will take a while to get there."

"Fortunately, it seems we've managed to instil a sense of long-termism in the squad. The players know that losing in

Paris did not automatically make them a poor side, any more than drawing with the Blacks made them a great one. We lost sight of a few basics against France and we happened to catch them on one of their good days. Against Wales, we'll take it right back down to winning our one-on-ones, our individual battles, and build from there."

Win or lose, you suspect that Dallaglio will thrive in his one-on-one today. His ribs may well give him all manner of jip and the Henry Cooper-ish scar tissue over his right eye may well split asunder once again. But England's captain does not give a fig about being bloodied, provided he remains unbowed.

Scots hope for another home upset

By Simon Turnbull

IT SHOULD perhaps only be whispered in the mill towns of the Scottish Borders, but the winning team at Murrayfield this afternoon will be halfway to a Grand Slam. If Scotland happen to emerge victorious even those unfortunate who bought sweaters commemorating the 1996 Scottish Slam that never was before Dean Richards gave Rob Wainwright's men a mauling at Murrayfield, might be moved to actually don their premature purchases tonight.

The metaphorical counting of chickens is one thing, though. Accounting for the French cockerel promises to be quite another matter.

France have won five successive matches in the Five Nations' Championship since the 16-15 defeat in Cardiff that handed the 1996 title to England. Scotland will have to unbatch one of the all-time upsets to stop *Les Tricolores* stretching their winning run to six.

The form book has been famously torn up for this fixture

before. The French have a habit of freezing on Scottish soil. Only once since 1978 have they won at Murrayfield.

That was four years ago, when Jean-Luc Sadoury scored the opening try in a 20-12 success. Of the French XV who line up today, only he and Olivier Brouzet have savoured victory over the Scots in Scotland. It is a psychological crumb upon which the Scottish camp are hoping to feast. "I would like to think there is still a Murrayfield factor," Jim Telfer, Scotland's coach, said.

This factor did not, however, spare the Scots from ritual slaughter in their two pre-Christmas home internationals. Australia and South Africa inflicted record defeats, 37-8 and 68-10 respectively.

France ought to bury their Edinburgh bogey under a similar barrage of points this afternoon. It is, after all, just 11 months since the 47-20 Paris mis-match that left them celebrating their first *Grand Chelem* clinched on home ground while the Scots went homeward tail

think again with a record Five Nations' defeat.

France showed in their 24-17 win against England a fortnight ago that their own trampling by the Springboks has not done any permanent damage to the combination of forward power and attacking pace that Jean-Claude Skrela and Pierre Villepreux have blended into their ranks. Scotland's victory in Dublin was an altogether more prosaic affair.

The class gap between the nations is perhaps further emphasised by the extent of attacking faith the Scottish selectors have invested in Derrick Lee. "Derrick is an exciting young prospect who gives us attacking options," Telfer said. "He played well against Ireland."

The London Scottish full-back, however, only played the final five minutes in Dublin. That is the extent of international experience he will bring to bear in direct opposition to Sadoury, who won the first of his 61 caps as a replacement for Serge Blanco in Cardiff seven years ago.

Scotland's task might not be so daunting if the cutting edge of Sadoury was the extent of their worries. From one to 15, though, the French have the sharpness to slice through.

Alan Tait stands to make history as the first Scottish player to score a try in four successive Five Nations games. The trouble is the Newcastle Falcons will probably have his claws full fighting a rearguard battle. It is likely to be a losing battle, too. But, then, Scotland would still be a third of the way to a Triple Crown.

Score tries in four successive Five Nations games. The trouble is the Newcastle Falcons will probably have his claws full fighting a rearguard battle.

It is likely to be a losing battle, too. But, then, Scotland would still be a third of the way to a Triple Crown.

Lee speeds in to last four

Snooker

Stephen Lee made it a television debut to forget for the surprise Regal Scottish Open quarter-finalist, Chris Scanlon, in Aberdeen yesterday.

Lee, the world No 16, raced to a 5-0 whitewash of his London rival in just 84 minutes to reach his second major semi-final of the season.

The unheralded Scanlon had won his previous two games by the same margin but, as Lee admitted: "I don't think I would have beaten Chris by that score if I'd been playing on one of the outside tables."

"Chris couldn't really settle down, probably because it was his first time before the cameras."

Lee now meets the Scotman Marcus Campbell or Scanlon's practice partner, Ronnie O'Sullivan, in the semi-finals today.



A good ear: 'The ability to listen is the greatest attribute you can have as an ambitious sportsman,' Lawrence Dallaglio said this week, as he prepared for today's game against Wales.

Photograph: David Ashdown

Travails of Winter now in the past

Boxing

MARK WINTERS faces a battle of the mind in the first defence of his British light welterweight title against the Londoner, Bernard Paul, in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, tonight.

The Ulsterman returns to the ring following the unhappy circumstances surrounding his title victory in October at the Sheffield Arena when his opponent, Carl Wright, subsequently fell into a coma, requiring surgery to remove a blood clot.

Wright has made a remarkable recovery following his fight for life and is backing the champion's quest to make the Lonsdale belt his own.

The unbeaten Winters, a part-time travel agent in Antrim, spent time with the Liverpudlian and his family leading up to his first defence.

"I spent a week in Liverpool sparing with the WBU [World Boxing Union] champion Shea Neary and Andy Holligan and spent a lot of time with Carl," Winters said. "He has told me to go on and win the Lonsdale belt and I am dedicating this fight to him."

"It was the greatest moment of my career so far to win the British title and the next day it was the worst moment when I heard about Carl."

"I considered quitting the ring and my career was on hold until I knew that Carl had recovered. Everybody asks me how I will react once I get in the ring and I simply won't know until I get in there."

One thing the 26-year-old is certain about is victory over Paul, although the former Commonwealth champion has predicted that he will knock him out "in the later rounds".

Winters retorted: "There is no chance that I will lose my title to Bernard. He says he is a hard puncher but I've been sparring with Shea Neary and Bernard doesn't hit harder than him."

Paul, from Tottenham, is arguably having his last attempt at lifting a major title at the age of 32, having lost the Commonwealth belt to Paul Burke in August. That followed a controversial points win at Bethnal Green in April over Felix Bwalya, who subsequently died three days after defeating Burke at the end of last year.

The Commonwealth title is now vacant and Burke has been nominated to fight for the belt, with Ghana's Judas Clottey expected to be the opponent.

Paul would like a re-match with Burke but has focused on toppling Winters, who will be making his first appearance at home following 12 straight wins.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth cruiserweight champion, Darren Corbett, faces the Belgian Dirk Wallyn in a 10-round non-title fight. Wallyn was last seen in a British ring losing in 90 seconds to the former European champion Johnny Nelson and Corbett is expected to deliver a similar result before his world title bout with the World Boxing Organisation champion, Carl Thompson.

"I can't take any chances because my title fight with Thompson would be gone if I lost," said Corbett. "The fight with Thompson is expected to happen on 18 or 25 April."

The unbeaten Brixton heavyweight Danny Williams should chalk up his 13th straight victory inside the distance when he faces Tim Ray from Kentucky.

Running rugby at its most Austintatious.

(Healey scores first try,
£20 pays £260*)

ENGLAND v WALES

Twickenham. Kick off 2.00 pm. Live on Sky.
1/7 ENGLAND
First Tryscorer
12/1 K. Bracken
12/1 A. Healey
14/1 J. Guscott
14/1 B. Howard
14/1 M. Parry
18/1 N. Beck
18/1 A. Ballman
18/1 S. Gibbs
20/1 S. Quirrell

4/1 WALES
22/1 DRAW

Wining Points Margin
13/2 England win by 1-5 points
6/1 England win by 6-10 points
4/1 England win by 11-15 points
5/1 England win by 16-20 points
9/1 England win by 21-25 points
7/1 Wales win by 1-5 points
1/1 Wales win by 6-10 points
22/1 Wales win by 11-15 points

SCOTLAND v FRANCE

Murrayfield. Kick off 3.00 pm. Live on BBC.
4/1 SCOTLAND
First Tryscorer
10/1 C. Lamaison
16/1 P. Carbonneau
16/1 G. Armstrong
16/1 T. Castaignede
20/1 G. Townsend
25/1 R. Wainwright

17/1 FRANCE
22/1 DRAW

Wining Points Margin
7/1 Scotland win by 1-5 points
10/1 Scotland win by 6-10 points
5/1 France win by 5-10 points
7/1 France win by 11-15 points
5/1 France win by 16-20 points

Substitutes: M. R. Shepherd (Melscop),
17/5 Longstaff (Dundee HSF),
15/5 Nicoll (Bath), 19/5 Grimes (Wasps),
20/5 A. McRae (Kosci), 22/5 G. Graham (Newcastle),
22/5 G. Ellis (Celtic).

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Ladbrokes are favourites

McRae's relative success is the spur for elusive British driver's championship

Rallying

ALISTER MCRAE is determined to emulate his two famous rallying relatives by winning his second Mobil British Championship this year.

The 27-year-old from Larne knows that to uphold family pride, he must add to his 1995 triumph in the British series.

McRae's father Jimmy captured the title on five occasions

between 1981 and 1983, and still competes successfully in the championship's category for historic cars. And Alister's brother Colin took the crown in 1991 and 1992 before going on to become one of the world's leading rally drivers.

Alister had an excellent chance to claim a second championship last year when he headed the standings going into the final round on the Isle of Man. But just when he looked

set for glory, the Scot crashed his Volkswagen Golf and left the way clear for Mark Higgins to prise the title from his grasp.

The heartbreak of 1997 still haunts McRae but it has made him more determined to make amends this year. "I was disappointed to miss out on the championship last year and it's certainly something I'm hoping to put right this time," he said.

"I'd like to win the title again to equal Colin's record, although

I'm not sure about winning it five times like my father did."

McRae has plenty of faith in his Volkswagen team, who won the manufacturer's championship last year despite their No1 driver's mishap in the Manx event.

"I'm very confident about the coming season," said McRae. "We know our car will be very competitive in the gravel circuit early in the season and will have a new model,

His own personal pursuit of glory will begin in the first round of the driver's series, the Vauxhall Rally of Wales, next month.

which will be a major step forward on the tarmac round later on."

McRae will be in action today when he opens Volkswagen's bid to retain the manufacturer's championship in the season's curtain-raiser, the Silverstone rally sprint.

His own personal pursuit of glory will begin in the first round of the driver's series, the Vauxhall Rally of Wales, next month.

No qualms with Kwan's artistry, but the ice still left me dry



CHRIS MAUME
SPORT ON TV

IN A WEEK when the Americans are shaping up to play the global hulley again, it was fun to see them having their huffs whipped on the ice in Nagano (BBC, Eurosport). CBS had paid £235m for the rights in the Olympic Games, nearly as much as Brian Laudrup's pay packet at Stamford Bridge next season, but once their men's ice hockey team was knocked out, Americans indulged in their true national sport, operating the TV remote. It was during the figure skating, which was about all they had left (and about which I was slightly unkind last week) that I began to muse on ways to make the Games more spectator-friendly.

My first idea was to run the skating and the ice hockey

together. Picture Tara Lipinski, who seems in have been plucked from one of those obscene child beauty pageants (such psychosexual dynamite that adult spectators aren't allowed in), going through her routine at the same time as the Czech Republic and Kazakhstan were conducting research into the effects of severe physical trauma during sporting activity: weaving her way through a slalom of severed appendages, a Czech arm to her left, a Kazakh nose to her right, skidding nimbly through the pools of blood, which she rearranges in greater art across the ice...

Or the style-free Frenchman, Philippe Candeloro, who cut easily the most ridiculous figure in Nagano in his red and black jumpsuit, clearly the result

of an unnatural union between Michael Flatley, Bruce Springsteen and a dead dog, body-checked out of town by a couple of Finnish enforcers.

Or you could have a special bobsleigh course that dipped in the middle and put the two worst crews from the first run against each other, starting at opposite ends and providing fun and laughter for all the family when they met in the middle. Or better still, strap drug cheats (or Naeem Hamed) to a huge and run them off against the four-man hit squad (I admit here to the influence of the greatest comedian who ever lived, Bill Hicks, who advocated letting aged relatives go out with a bang as extras in Stephen Seagal movies: "Go on, grandma, walk

out into the middle - Wow, cool! He's kicked her head off!"

My favourite idea, though, and I don't see why it couldn't be done, would be to have knock-out heads-to-heads in the downhill skiing, just like the FA Cup. OK, they'd have to do a few more runs, but they could manage that, and how much better in race man against man, woman against woman, rather than out there alone shaving microscopically off the clock. You could, of course, run them all together, but that would just be silly.

With last week's harsh words in mind, I settled down to watch skating this weekend equipped with a vat of pen-poison. A short while later, I found myself doing the hitherto unthinkable - rewinding to watch Michelle

Kwan's routine a second, slightly shamefaced time.

The young American went to the Games riding a hype-wave hand-in-hand with her rival, Lipinski. It is unfair on them both, but I can't help associating them in my mind with Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding from four years ago, though I can't imagine Lipinski involved in anything more violent than screaming and screaming till she's thick. She is technically perfect, but a little soulless, while Kwan has the artistry, one manoeuvre, a spiral, in which she inscribed a line across the rink that had the finesse of a line drawing by Picasso, Matisse or Cocteau, was a lump-in-the-throat job. Honest. So I take it all back. Well, most of it. After

instead, and though Carling has still to learn how to look relaxed, Holmes was surprisingly unfussy, making sure each discussion stayed rational and interesting. They tried to pack far too much in Holmes leaping in on someone's mid-flow time and again. Having as guests the card-happy referee Graham Poll, and his assessor for the controversial Arsenal-Chelsea game this week, Philip Don, was a great idea, so why not let them expand at length?

The programme did, though, produce the line of the week, on the subject of the 40 per cent ticket-price hike at Chelsea. "I'm going to have my wages paid directly into the club," one fan said. "It's the only way to get a season ticket these days."

Incentive high for hopefus

Cricket

Derek Pringle
reports from Georgetown

IF THERE is a place designed to test the mettle of England's cricketers mid-way through their tour it is the next fortnight in Georgetown. A city built almost entirely of wood, it sits on the mouth of the mighty Essequibo river, a place where frontier meets backwater and the stuff coming out of your tap is the colour of tea.

The combination does not prevent the people here from dreaming about cricket, and although the place has done for one or two illustrious careers - Craig McDermott, the Australian fast bowler, ended his career when he twisted his ankle while jogging along the sea-wall - others such as Mark Ramprakash, whose father comes from these parts, will be looking to restart theirs.

Over the next three days, England, who will play all those not involved in the last Test, take on Guyana at the Everest Cricket Club. While Angus Fraser and Dean Headley take a well deserved rest - as does Graham Thorpe who has flu - there will be fierce competition, especially among those who have yet to play a match, to conspire against him.

Ironically, in view of Butcher's subsequent role, he would probably have played instead of the Surrey man in the last Test, had flu not struck him down the night before.

Frustration, particularly on this level, was not something the young Ramprakash would approach with equanimity. But if the responsibilities of fatherhood and the Middlesex captaincy have helped ameliorate his fiery disposition, the temptation to be gung-ho about the next few days must still be fairly strong?

"You could look at this as your big chance," said Ramprakash, who scored a century in

However, with Mark Butcher having taken his 11th-hour opportunity in the previous Test, it is John Crawley, the man in possession, who faces the sternest challenge from Ramprakash, though Adam Hollioake, providing his back has recovered, will also be in the shake-up.

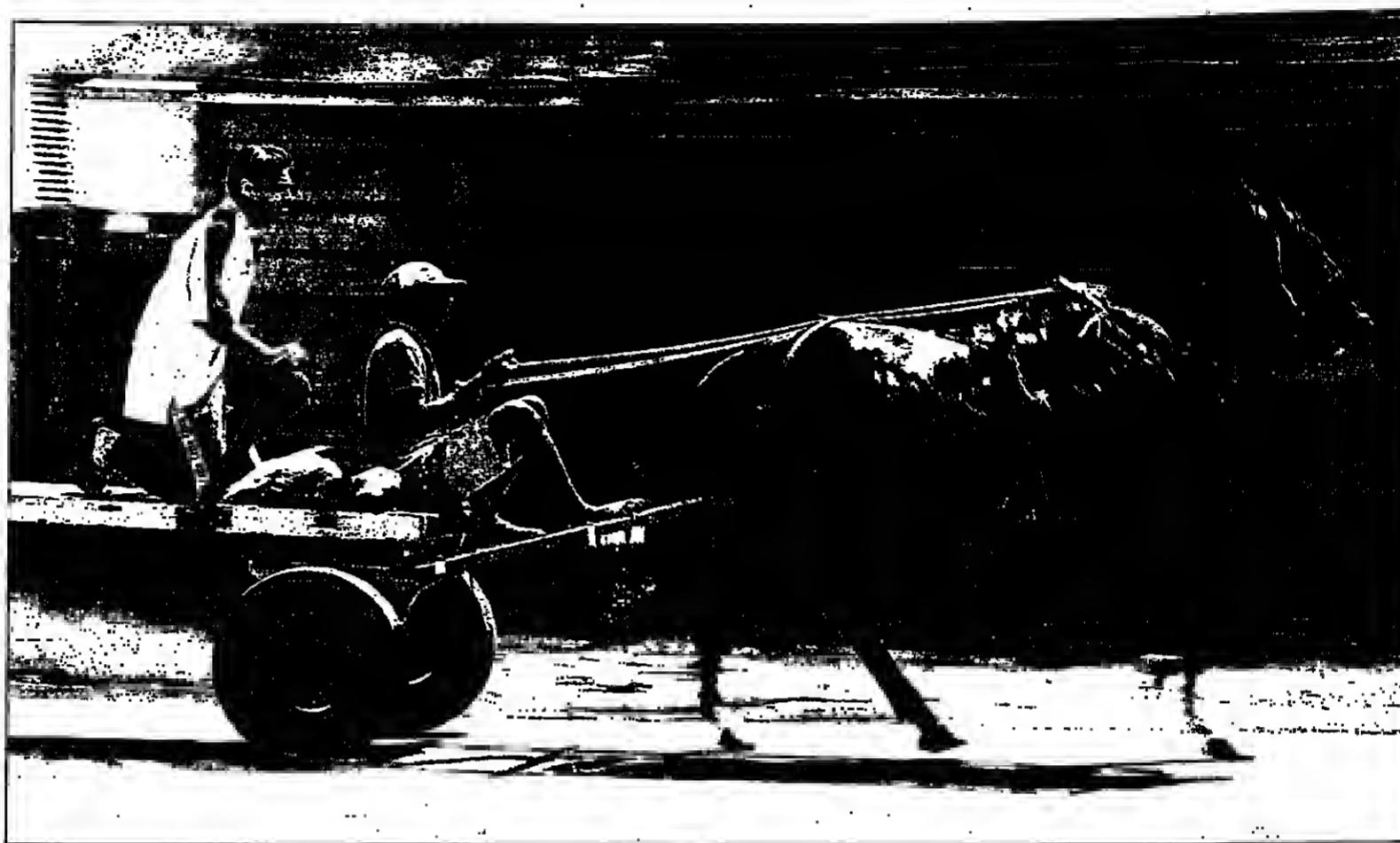
Since his debut in 1992, Ramprakash's Test career has been a series of false starts and disappointments, a fact his average of 17.2 indicates. Yet even when he plays well, as he did in the thrilling win against Australia at The Oval five months ago, fate always seem to conspire against him.

"I must admit, I came here expecting to start in the Test team," said Ramprakash, an assumption that appeared to be backed up when two of the selectors, Mike Gatting and Graham Goodwin, phoned earlier in the tour to enquire why Crawley had been preferred.

Ironically, in view of Butcher's subsequent role, he would probably have played instead of the Surrey man in the last Test, had flu not struck him down the night before.

Frustration, particularly on this level, was not something the young Ramprakash would approach with equanimity. But if the responsibilities of fatherhood and the Middlesex captaincy have helped ameliorate his fiery disposition, the temptation to be gung-ho about the next few days must still be fairly strong?

"You could look at this as your big chance," said Ramprakash, who scored a century in



Mark Ramprakash is finally heading for his first game of the tour against Guyana today

Photograph: Ross Setford/Empics

the corresponding fixture four years ago. "But that would be putting too much pressure on yourself. It's my first competitive match since September, so I'm not expecting too much, just to spend some time at the crease."

Pressure or not, the pitch at Everest looks a fair better surface than any of the Test pitches England have so far encountered. But if that perhaps offers a degree of unreality, the fact that 80 per cent of the overs in these first-class matches is bowled by spinners, as opposed to about 10 per cent or less in the Tests, means that runs here will not be worth their usual value as a currency of comparison.

As far as the opposition, who will be captained in Carl Hooper's absence by Shivnarine Chanderpaul, is strong, and contains the fast bowler

Reon King, a previous acquaintance from the West Indies A match earlier in the tour, as well as the prolific left-hand opening batsman Clayton Lambert.

If England are dwelling over who might bat at No 3, calls in several local newspapers for the inclusion of the 36-year old Lambert to replace Stuart Williams in the Test team, reveals the serious lack of hitting depth currently afflicting West Indies cricket.

A stalwart for Guyana, Lambert played his only Test match against England in 1991, when he was one of Phil Tufnell's six victims in the first innings. If like Ramprakash, he still has aspirations of adding to his tally of caps, it is a mistake he will not be wanting to repeat over the next couple of days.

England A fought against tour fatigue to fall to seven balls short of claiming a memorable victory and levelling the series in yesterday's second one-day international against Sri Lanka A.

Needing victory to draw level in the three-match series after their 142-run defeat in Moratawa on Wednesday, England A made a determined attempt to defend a disappointing total of 186 but were unable to prevent Sri Lanka A succeeding in the penultimate day.

However, despite their failure to reach a challenging total, England bowled and fielded superbly and pressured Sri Lanka to such an extent that they needed 47 off the final 10 overs with three wickets remaining.

"We're very disappointed because we have lost the series but it was a magnificent effort in the field and we fell 186 was a bit short of a good total," Nick Knight, the captain, said. Ben Hollioake epitomised England A's determination by bowling Avishka Gunawardene with the first delivery of the innings.

England had suffered an equally disastrous start after being put into bat by losing Knight, Andrew Flintoff, Hollioake and Darren Maddy inside the opening 21 overs.

Sri Lanka A won toss

ENGLAND A

• N V Knight run out

• A Mithali & Gunesarathne b Pathirajapu

• D L Naidoo & S de Alwis b Pathirajapu

• O A Samuels & C Bandaranayake b Pathirajapu

• D L Naidoo & C Bandaranayake b Pathirajapu

• D R Wilson & M Chandrapala b Pathirajapu

• D A Foster run out

• D Easwaran b Pathirajapu

• D Easwaran

Wenger outburst over Chelsea 'divers'

Football

By Nick Harris

Arsène Wenger yesterday risked the wrath of the Football Association by calling Arsenal's Coca-Cola Cup conquerors Chelsea "experienced divers" and saying the semi-final referee, Graham Poll's dismissal of Patrick Vieira was "absolutely ridiculous."

Wenger, speaking in a calm and calculated manner two days after the Stamford Bridge match, revealed his sense of injustice and a daunting injury list for today's home Premiership

match against Crystal Palace. Wenger criticised Poll, who dished out 10 yellow cards and one red on Wednesday night, and then appeared 24 hours later on a television show in which he took up an invitation to justify his decisions.

Wenger said: "I think he should have stayed at home – on both nights. I'm very disappointed because it seemed everything went against us. We were not angels but you have to say that if Vieira was sent off then 10 other players could have gone off before and after him." He also thinks Vieira, who

has collected 23 yellow cards in less than two seasons, has become a victim of his reputation.

"The first booking against Vieira was absolutely ridiculous because for me it is a dive by [Gianluca] Vialli," Wenger said. "I said to the players who had been booked before half-time that it was very important not to be involved in anything that might bring a second yellow card but it was such a physical battle and they [Chelsea] have much more experience. They dived a lot."

The European Commission has written to the World Cup

Organising Committee (CFO) demanding that it drops a requirement for non-residents ordering tickets to have a postal address in France.

The letter accuses the CFO of breaching the principles of free and fair competition within the EU's single market and warns legal steps will follow unless the rule is dropped within a fortnight. More than 60 per cent of tickets have already been sold exclusively to people living in France, but the European Commission hopes that its action will allow greater access to any tickets remaining on sale.

The Commission has also told the CFO that its ticket policy disadvantages anyone living outside France because the only option is to buy through agents, who are asking high prices. "There is clear discrimination. We want to see more European citizens, and not only in France, being able to buy tickets," it said.

If the CFO decides to ignore the warning letter, the Commission will proceed to a formal statement of objections to its system. If that is not heeded the organisers will be fined for every day they continue with the infraction.

Blackburn's manager, Roy Hodgson, is stepping up his move for Lazio's Pierluigi Casiraghi. Hodgson sent his assistant, Tony Parkes, to watch Casiraghi against Juventus in the Italian Cup on Thursday.

Tottenham hope to complete the £2.3m signing of Moussa Saito, the 26-year-old Algerian midfielder, from the Spanish club Valencia next week. Spurs' manager, Christian Gross, targeted the former Auxerre man soon after replacing Gerry Francis but had to wait for Saito to end his involvement with the Africa Nations' Cup.

SIDELINES

From Fulham Road to Filbert Street

MARTIN O'NEILL'S two years as manager have arguably been the most successful in Leicester City's history. But older fans tend to become more misty-eyed about the flair which characterised Jimmy Bloomfield's reign in the 1970s, much of it served up by refugees from today's visitors, Chelsea.

Keith Weller, Chris Garland and Steve Kember all arrived from Stamford Bridge, while Alan Birchenall (now a PR man at Leicester) linked up after devoting to Crystal Palace. Combining with other recruits from the capital like Jon Samuels and Steve Earle, plus the distinctly un-Southern Frank Worthington, their flamboyance contrasted with the functionalism of O'Neill's team.

Weller's final goal for Leicester – scored in a pair of white tights worn for protection against the cold – symbolised the end of an era in 1979. Bloomfield had already left, yet Filbert Street continued to tap the Fulham Road connection. David Webb, who had won the FA Cup for Chelsea in 1970 and later occupied their manager's chair, was relegated in his only full season with the Foxes.

Another of Bloomfield's Cockney colony, Dennis Rose, left for Chelsea in 1980. The same year, Hereford's Andy Feeley went on loan to Chelsea, whose failure to make the deal permanent disheartened him so much he went off to play for Trowbridge. His manager there, a certain Mr Birchenall, sold him to Leicester where he became the regular right-back. Muzzy Izzet, signed by O'Neill for £800,000 from Runcorn Galil, provides the "ex" factor today.

Ten things that Southampton's Norwegian Egil Ostenstad might be missing today



1 His home town, Haugesund, which often freezes over and the Pope once passed.

2 The world's longest table (covered in pickled herrings) which is erected for coastal festival days.

3 Glacier hiking in Nigardsbrean, guaranteed to be less perilous than a season at Southampton.

4 The statue of writhing bodies in Oslo's Vigeland Park. Evokes all emotions from unfettered joy to total despair, not unlike watching Matt Le Tissier.

5 More fresh fish than you can shake a stick at.

6 A day in Hell, a town which often freezes over and the Pope once passed.

7 The world's longest

8 Glacier hiking in Nigardsbrean, guaranteed to be less perilous than a season at Southampton.

9 The statue of writhing bodies in Oslo's Vigeland Park. Evokes all emotions from unfettered joy to total despair, not unlike watching Matt Le Tissier.

10 More fresh fish than you can shake a stick at.

NAME OF THE GAME No 23: PEGASUS

Famous for their extraordinary exploits in the FA Amateur Cup in the 1950s, Pegasus won it twice at Wembley in front of 100,000 crowds. The name Pegasus (winged horse) was adopted in recognition of the names of the two university clubs from which they drew membership, Oxford's Centaurs and Cambridge's Falcons. The club lasted just 15 years.

THIS WEEK

HISTORY LESSON

ON 19 February 1965, Chelsea's manager Tommy Docherty stunned the football world by coolly selling their prized striker, Tommy Knox, to Newcastle.

It did not hinder their progress that season. The next day they beat Tottenham 1-0 in the fifth round of the FA Cup. They were top of the League at the time, and progressing in the League Cup, and a Daily Mirror headline even asked: "Heck! Why not Chelsea for the lot?"

They didn't quite win the lot, but it might hearten Gianluca Vialli to note that Chelsea finished third in the First Division, were semi-finalists in the FA Cup and won the League Cup.

THIS WEEK'S TRANSFERS

Transfers

Peter Beardsley (forward) Bolton to Manchester City; Craig Little (defender) Middlesbrough to Darlington; Lee Brice (defender) Sheffield Wednesday to Macclesfield; Steve Birtwistle (goalkeeper) Rochdale to West Ham; Dean Hill (midfielder) Tottenham to Coventry; Bryan Gunn (goalkeeper) Norwich to Hibernian; Steve Davis (defender) Bury to Oxford; Steve Elliott (defender) Rangers to St Mirren; Lee Charles (forward) QPR to Cambridge; Mark Crossley (midfielder) Nottingham Forest to Millwall; Tony Lomer (forward) Preston to Northampton; Darren (forward) Darlington to Peterborough; Zelie Rowe (forward) Peterborough to Doncaster; Steve Marshall (defender) York to Darlington; Neil Woods (forward) Mansfield; Jim Crawford (midfielder) Newcastle to Dundee Utd; Manny Ottomarino (forward) West Ham to Dundee Utd.

Loans/trials

Peter Beardsley (forward) Bolton to Manchester City; Craig Little (defender) Middlesbrough to Darlington; Lee Brice (defender) Sheffield Wednesday to Macclesfield; Steve Birtwistle (goalkeeper) Rochdale to West Ham; Dean Hill (midfielder) Tottenham to Coventry; Bryan Gunn (goalkeeper) Norwich to Hibernian; Steve Davis (defender) Bury to Oxford; Steve Elliott (defender) Rangers to St Mirren; Lee Charles (forward) QPR to Cambridge; Mark Crossley (midfielder) Nottingham Forest to Millwall; Tony Lomer (forward) Preston to Northampton; Darren (forward) Darlington to Peterborough; Zelie Rowe (forward) Peterborough to Doncaster; Steve Marshall (defender) York to Darlington; Neil Woods (forward) Mansfield; Jim Crawford (midfielder) Newcastle to Dundee Utd; Manny Ottomarino (forward) West Ham to Dundee Utd.

Reid and Robson on the rise

Forget Newcastle, the best football in the North-east is to be found in Sunderland and Middlesbrough. Ian Potts reports

IT IS live on Sky, it is the nearest thing Newcastle have to a Premiership derby this season, but Leeds United's jaunt up to St James' Park tomorrow is not the biggest game in the North-east this weekend.

That takes place down by the Riverside this afternoon; Middlesbrough against Sunderland, Second in the First Division against third. Two teams whose combined gates topped 70,000 in midweek.

Boro's sell-out for their Coca-Cola Cup semi-final return with Liverpool was perhaps predictable. Less so the Nationwide League record of 40,579 who contributed to the first lock-out at the Stadium of Light.

This, remember, on a chilly Tuesday night in February, which saw Peter Reid's side skid to a 4-1 win over a Reading team whose travelling contingent totalled 150 fans.

On and off the field, the response by both clubs to last season's disastrous demotion from the Premiership has been remarkable, and only magnified by the Magpies' fall from grace.

The parts played by



Paul Merson (left) and Kevin Phillips are setting the pace at Middlesbrough and Sunderland

Photographs: Empics

major summer signings should not be undersold. Paul Merson's decision to leave Arsenal for provincial Boro took the country by surprise. On a local level, though, the impact of Lee Clark's conversion from black and white to red and white was second only to the tremors which greeted Kevin Keegan's exit from Newcastle.

Both players were medium-large fry in a big pool, but neither were first choice on the manager's menu. Given new,

unprecedented responsibility, the pair have flourished and are emerging as the outstanding candidates for the region's player of the year award.

Despite the departures of Juninho, Ravanelli and Emerson, manager Bryan Robson has drafted in high-profile replacements, using Merson's arrival to tempt Andy Townsend, the Colombian striker Hamilton Ricard and the Italian front man, Marco Branca. By contrast, Reid seems to have

scoured the Nationwide handbook to come up with 21-goal Kevin Phillips from Watford and the classy centre-back Jody Craddock from Cambridge.

Never once straying from the part-line, Robson has always insisted that promotion is this season's No 1 objective. The failure of last year's triple mission, when Wembley was attacked on two fronts while the club simultaneously fought for Premiership survival, left too many scars.

No sooner had they com-

pleted the ceremonial spraying of the dressing-room walls on Wednesday, with a second successive Coca-Cola Cup final assured, than the players were warned to leave the rest of the champagne on ice.

"I told the lads they could have a good half hour, but that was it," said Robson, known to enjoy the occasional party himself. "We all wanted to celebrate, but they knew they had to rest and recover in time for Sunderland, because that game is more important than Liverpool."

Without such diversions, Reid has taken Sunderland on a thrilling run which has seen them lose just one of their last 20 League games.

Curious, it is the Scouser, Reid, who has made his home on Teesside, while North-east born Robson commutes from Manchester. Yet despite the rivalry of their team's followers, the pair remain close friends. They have been known to compare notes at a wine bar in Yarm. Tonight's session could be a long one.

Moore expected to stand in for Van Hooijdonk

By Wyn Griffiths

FOR Van Hooijdonk is with the Netherlands in the United States this weekend and any hopes of Forest making it cool Britannia on their trip to the Potteries will rest largely on the shoulders of Ian Moore, the Dutch striker's stead. Dave Bassett, the Forest manager, has Jon Olav Hjelde standing by should the defender Steve Chettle fail to overcome a back injury.

Their opponents, currently in 19th place, will be hoping that Kyle Loughton has shaken off the flu bug that threatens to rule their £500,000 signing from Coventry out of the game. Stoke's striking resources are further depleted by the loss of their top scorer, Peter Thorne, ruled out with a rib injury, but the winger Danny Tiatto is expected to play on the left.

Bassett's former club, Sheffield United, travel to Birmingham tomorrow in fourth place, just behind Sunderland and Middlesbrough, who meet today. Earl Barrett has extended his loan spell from Everton while Don Hutchison is still a Blades player, although his move to Everton looks likely. He is, though, starting a two-match suspension.

Darren Purse, Birmingham's new £600,000 central defender from Oxford, should make his debut at St Andrew's. Gary Ablett is set to return but Birmingham and Middlesbrough are still without their leading scorer, Paul Furlong, and the midfielder Chris Marsden, who are both suspended. The midfielder Steve Robinson returns after completing a two-match ban.

Without Henman because their No 3, Andrew Richardson, is too far down the world list.

Rusedski won the opening set in 30 minutes with a stinging second serve of 134mph but Johansson sent a return long over the baseline.

Another quarter-final was taken care of without a match as Johansson's compatriot, Magnus Larsson, pulled out before his contest with the holder, Marc Rosset of Sweden, with an ankle problem.

Rusedski earned a break for 4-3 in the third as Johansson saved one break point but

Woodroffe, reached the first singles final of her career at the WTA Challenger tournament at Redbridge Sports Centre, Essex, yesterday. The 21-year-old, seeded No 2, beat Tiba Krizan, of Slovakia, 6-4, 6-4 in a semi-final lasting 73 minutes.

Today's final, Woodroffe meets Yugoslavia's Sandra Naucik, the world No 205 who beat Karen Cross, the third seed from Exeter, 6-3, 7-5 in 81 minutes.

Britain's No 2, Lorna

Henman's lack of consultation disappoints Rusedski

Tennis

GREG RUSEDSKI scraped through to the semi-finals of the European Community Championship in Antwerp yesterday and then attacked Tim Henman.

Rusedski beat Sweden's Thomas Johansson 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 and said he was generally happy with his form but he was more keen to express his disappointment that he had been

the last person to know about Henman's decision not to play in the World Team Championship in May. "Tim talked to the press before I knew," he said. "I'm disappointed. This might have been the only chance for Britain to play there. It's also great preparation for the French Open."

Last year he was asking me if I could play there and even trying to get a wild card for Britain."

Britain will not be eligible to compete in this year's team tournament in Düsseldorf because Henman has declared himself unavailable, preferring instead to take a week off to prepare for the French Open and the subsequent grass-court season in England.

Eight teams are selected for the annual competition using the combined rankings of each nation's top two representatives. Britain will not be chosen

without Henman because their No 3, Andrew Richardson, is too far down the world list.

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Bullets 20 wins from 25

games, ahead of Sheffield

Sharks on 19 from 25 and Tow-

ers in fourth, but they cannot af-

ford to lose another game.

SNOW REPORTS

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At a

Kidnapping the ref's wife and other guerrilla tactics win freedom



THE GAFFER TAPES

FIRST: I would like to say a big thank you to all the well-wishers who sent cards expressing their concern at my fate over the last few weeks. I'll be sending both of you a signed photograph.

You might not recognise me straight away as I've had some fresh ones taken to capture my new look. A month in the Central American jungle has achieved where a decade of dieting and half-a-dozen fat farms failed. I'm down to an elfin 13st and I'll be eternally grateful to Pedro, the guerrillas' cook, for his help. His bark-and-leaf quiche and cockroach casserole were so good I'm going to incorporate them

in both the players' diet and the club's pie stands.

I was a bit sorry to leave Pedro and the boys. After the first week or so, when they kept me chained to the outside toilet (convenient while I got used to the grub but you had to check under the seat for black widow spiders before relaxing), they turned out to be a decent set of lads. Football's a universal language and once I said "Bobbie Charlton" and "Tunces Casarceno" they were great.

It turned out they had a team of their own and, luckily for me, needed a new manager – the old one had been tortured to death under suspicion

of being a government informer. The politics was a bit tricky and my experience of managing Manchester City a few years ago came in handy – not that Peter Swales went as far as pulling his managers' fingernails out.

The players were pretty useful, all they needed was some English tactical nous. Once I'd stopped their pony passing around, stuck the biggest bloke up front and told them to hoof it at his head and play for the second ball, we were flying and reached the final of the Guevara Cup. This is a big deal in guerrilla football so, before the match, I gave them all a glass of tequila to relax them. It seemed to do the trick, though the added precaution of taking the referee's wife hostage to concentrate his mind might have helped. We won 3-0 with Ruben Tuesda, our star striker, scoring a hat-trick of penalties.

They were so delighted they offered me my freedom on condition I asked Tony Blair to set up a task force to examine their grievances. I've been to see him and pointed out that travelling in the area and asking questions is a very dangerous activity. We're hopeful David Mellor will find time to head up the group.

Tuesda has come back with me. It's a bit of a problem that

he's wanted in 30 countries and I don't think he'll be on the post-season tour of the USA but I'm sure he'll be a big asset. The Sludgethorpe Popular Front have offered to sponsor his kit and find a series of safe houses while we negotiate with MI6. He needs a bit of time to settle in: I had to tell him we don't go round kidnapping referees; we just get Sky TV and BBC Radio to slaughter them.

While I made a lot of good friends out there – and we still keep in touch through the Internet (gnu.co/rebel.wvu) – it's good to be home, especially as I understand few backstabbers have been active in my absence. It took a dozen cases of the finest Cuban cigars – from Fidel's personal collection – to persuade Sir Hiram to vacate the manager's office although I am grateful to him for sacking that traitor Kit Mann. The nine Premiership points he won to lift us off the bottom are handy, too.

With Kit gone we are a bit

light on coaching staff and I'm

hoping we can come to an arrangement with Roud. We've

offered him a 30-minute stint,

twice weekly, at £100 a session netto. Plus he gets his own personal Gatorade bottle and can sit in the good corner of the dressing-room, the one which doesn't get flooded by the

showers. In the meantime I've asked Fritz Unstarz to be player-coach. He could be a natural. He has a voice like a town crier and can take out an entire row of tea cups with one sweep of his arm.

Not having seen the team play for a month I've had to take a bit of advice on selection. I checked out those papers that give players marks out of 10, averaged out performances, and came up with the best XI. After Fritz pointed out there was only one defender I made a few changes. Ivor Niggle and Shaun Prone were the unlucky ones.

Barry Gaffer was talking to Glenn Moore

McLeish seeks belief from his Hibernian side

HIBERNIAN'S manager, Alex McLeish, wants his new charges to shake off any feelings of self-pity when they face Rangers at Easter Road. McLeish takes charge of the Premier Division's bottom club for the first time today after his move from Motherwell nine days ago.

"Hibs may be down at the bottom but I'm convinced there is enough ability in the squad to turn things around. But the players have got to want it," McLeish said.

McLeish will give a debut to the goalkeeper Bryan Gunn, who joined the club on a three-month loan deal this week from Norwich. There could also others change to the side.

Manny Omoniyi is likely to start on the bench for Dundee United at Dunfermline after joining them on a month's deal from West Ham. The 20-year-old Nigerian-born winger has been allowed to move to Tamadie in the short term by the Hammers manager, Harry Redknapp, to build up his fitness.

Celtic's head coach, Wim Jansen, views every game remaining this term as effectively being a cup final as his side aim for the treble of league and both domestic cups, having already won the Coca-Cola trophy.

The latest of these so-called finals sees second-placed Celtic take on Kilmarnock at Parkhead with Jansen looking for a repeat of Monday's determination and composure that brought a convincing 2-1 Scottish Cup win at Dunfermline.

"Every player needs to be really concentrated now for every match and I think they understand that is necessary as every game is a cup final for us now," the Dane said. "The way we have played recent games has been very good as we have put pressure on the opposition from the outset and that is important from our way of playing."

Today's opponents are Kilmarnock, whose manager, Bobby Williamson, hopes his side will bounces back from surrendering their hold on the Scottish Cup in a fourth-round defeat in this year's competition by Ayr. "It really does not matter if we go on to win our next five league games, it won't make up for that loss," he said. "But, having said that, we know we have just got to get on with it."

Elsewhere, Motherwell's caretaker manager, Jim Griffin, will take charge for the first, and probably last, time at home to title-chasing Hearts.

Juninho, who returned to

Spain

THE Spanish League's Appeals Committee overturned a four-match ban on Thursday which had been given to the Celta Vigo defender Michel Salgado after an incident in which the former Middlesbrough player, Juninho, broke his leg.

The Committee quashed the suspension given to Salgado on Monday. Earlier this month, Salgado escaped without even a booking after hacking down the Brazilian during Celta's 1-1 draw with Atletico Madrid.

Some 6,000 Celta fans had taken to the streets of Vigo to protest against the ban on Tuesday, while players from all over Spain had expressed their disagreement with the ban. Many reporters felt that Salgado would not have been sanctioned at all if Juninho had not been such a high-profile player.

Juninho, who returned to

Brazil on Wednesday, looks likely to miss the rest of the Spanish season and the World Cup finals in France in June. He had voiced his support for the ban given to his assailant and will be horrified to learn that it was never overturned.

"It should serve as an example," Juninho had said. "It should always be like that. If not, football becomes a joke."

Brazil

One of the forwards who is in contention to replace the injured Juninho in Brazil's World Cup squad, Edmundo, has carried out his threat to walk out on Fiorentina if the Italian Serie A club did not guarantee him a first-team place, and has flown home to Rio de Janeiro.

The colourful striker arrived from the Brazilian club Vasco da Gama early last month after completing the league season

with Vasco, for whom he scored a record 28 goals but also received seven red cards.

"If I don't play for Fiorentina, then I'm going back to

Brazil," Edmundo said before he headed home. "This year there are the World Cup finals and I don't want to put them at risk. Italy is fine, Florence is a wonderful city and Italian football is exactly what I expected – but I was promised that I would play."

After a long absence from the Brazilian team for disciplinary reasons, Edmundo was recalled for the Gold Cup in the United States this month. Shortly after arriving back home on Thursday, he was spotted at the Salgueiro samba school, one of Rio's most popular carnival clubs.

Russia

Russia's national team, absent from the World Cup finals for the first time in 20 years, will get no more wages unless they qualify for the next European Championship in the year 2000.

their coach, Boris Ignatovic, said this week.

"The players don't know anything about it yet," he said. "There's likely to be a difficult discussion." Both France and Russia's neighbours, Ukraine, stand between Ignatovic's team and a place at Euro 2000 in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Gazprom, the massive Russian gas monopoly, withdrew its lucrative sponsorship of the national team last year after a series of poor results.

Nigeria

Nigeria, banned from the African Nations' Cup in Burkina Faso, meet Jamaica in a friendly in Kingston tomorrow. The Olympic champions have recalled a striker who was one of their main men at USA '94: Rashidi Yekini, now with FC Zuriel. He has not played for Nigeria for two years.

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109 days... and counting until the World Cup finals begin in France

Tottenham's former French international forward David Girola has admitted he has little hope of making Aimé Jacquet's national squad for the World Cup finals.

"It would be truly fantastic," said Girola when asked what his chances were of qualifying. "Jacquet, the French coach...

"The player in me, that which gives everything in every match, would still love to believe I could go – but the human being in me has doubts. I am a realist and if I was a betting man I know it is unlikely I will be in the squad."

"Of course I would love to play – and I wouldn't mind someone giving me a ring from time to time," the 31-year-old added. "I have taken back in love with my job. I am much more positive now."

Rupert Metcalfe



Terrace fashion, Istanbul style: Galatasaray fans wear Fenerbahce shirts during the 2-2 draw between the bitter Turkish rivals last Sunday. Photograph: AP

Juninho's assailant escapes ban

Brazil

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"If I don't play for Fiorentina, then I'm going back to

Brazil," Edmundo said before he headed home. "This year there are the World Cup finals and I don't want to put them at risk. Italy is fine, Florence is a wonderful city and Italian football is exactly what I expected – but I was promised that I would play."

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FOOTBALL AROUND THE WORLD BY RUPERT METCALF

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Wilkins revels in the winning game

The fulcrum of Fulham's footballing renaissance is bonding both old and new at the Cottage, he tells Glenn Moore

IT IS a crisp morning in south-west London. A minute ago Ray Wilkins had grabbed hold of the base of a cast-iron goal and helped lug it into position on the dewy grass. Now he is standing chatting to an expensively dressed Brazilian, an agent seeking a trial for a promising teenage compatriot.

Welcome to Fulham, not yet a Premiership side, but not your average Nationwide League Second Division club either. Six months after Mohamed Al Fayed took over, and five months after he brought in Kevin Keegan and Wilkins, the club is still suffering from schizophrenia.

It is not just the incongruous scene in the training ground which, being hired from and shared with the BBC Sports Club, has a hockey pitch and a cafeteria in which players lunch alongside twin-set-and-pears ladies. It is also the oddity of the division's most expensive team playing in a dilapidated ground, watched by a support still struggling to let go of the cosy "we're crap and we don't mind" image.

"There is a lot of that about," admitted Wilkins after training. "Well, I mind and I think everybody else on my staff minds," he added, his brown eyes and smooth voice taking on an edge that is otherwise absent from the conversation. "We want to be a friendly club but we don't want anyone to beat us. We are in the results game and I won't be here if we don't win. I love being bere, so I want us to win."

Wilkins and Keegan were also greeted warmly when they arrived because of the sudden axing of the previous manager, Micky Adams. Have the fans now warmed to Wilkins? "I don't really know. As far as I'm concerned I'm here to do a job. Not everybody likes you - we would all like people to love us but that isn't the case. They will have their preference. That part of it doesn't really bother me. All I'm concerned about is making sure we function as a side and give them enjoyment."

"Winning helps but playing a bit of attractive football goes a long way as well. The club has a tradition of playing football, therefore it is important that we try and play along the floor."

"People say you can't pass your way out of this division but you can. Crewe did it. Before losing at Oldham last Saturday we went nine games undefeated by playing football. We have worked as hard as the opposition, then our football has come in to it and we have won comfortably at times - sometimes away from home. It took a while to convince the players, it always does - there are so many people putting negatives in their heads."

That was merely one of the problems with the players. A glance around the car park shows up the disparity in dressing-room income. Last season's Third Division promotion-winning team was largely



'People say you can't pass your way out of this division, but you can' says Ray Wilkins who was yesterday busily directing Fulham's promotion push. Photograph: David Ashdown

built on free transfers. Now Fulham are spending £2m on one player (Chris Coleman from Blackburn). Saturday's team had just three players inherited by Wilkins of whom only one, Matty Lawrence, was in the promotion team.

Many others remain, playing reserve team football, and Wilkins admits bonding new and old had

been "tough". To help the process, first team and reserves train together, either in the entire 31-man squad or as defenders, midfielders and forwards. Group lunches have helped as have the day-to-day trappings of Al Fayed's investment, such as more luxurious accommodation and travel for away games. However, Wilkins admits that some would prefer to be

playing in the first team than having a trouser press in their hotel room.

Training did suggest a happy club, however, and Wilkins added: "We've tried to treat everybody with the same respect and give everybody a chance. We still have players who were here when we arrived. They are all very happy, they work their socks off and it is nice to know if someone

is injured I have no qualms whatsoever putting someone in. I have seen some improvement in every player at the club and that is down to them being prepared to work hard."

The coaching aspect of the job is what drew Wilkins, sacked by Queen's Park Rangers after they were relegated, back to management when he could have settled for television punditry, advertising and suchlike. "The bit I enjoy is getting out there with the lads. You still think you can play [he won 84 England caps and his clubs included Manchester United, Chelsea, Milan and Rangers]. I can't, but it is nice to get out there and pitch yourself against them."

"We are in the winning game and

I want to win but I get an enormous kick out of seeing people improve, seeing them do something on a Saturday that you might have done on the training ground with them. It shows that what you say is being taken on board."

Wilkins does more coaching than he did at QPR but does little else differently. "The hardest thing there was that I was working with a group of mates - they were team-mates a few months before. I sincerely hope Gianluca Vialli handles that side of it at Chelsea because I found it a problem. They were my friends and suddenly you have to go in and boss them. I very seldom baffle people. I prefer to talk to them but even that was difficult. However, judging by last [Wednesday] night he'll do very well."

Wilkins and Keegan are doing well themselves, too. Fulham, who host Wigan today, have risen to the play-off places which are being keenly contested behind the leaders, Watford, and Bristol City. That pair look certain for automatic promotion but have stumbled recently and Wilkins insists they can be caught. "We have to be ready. It has been a problem getting players to drop down to this division but it does give them extra impetus to make sure we get out. That has been a real plus in the dressing-room. Before games, they really are quite hyped up."

Given that Fulham have spent the vast sum, at this level, of £5m on players few Second Division fans want to see Fulham succeed. "There is a lot of resentment on opposition terraces but they only have to look around at the stadiums they are playing in: there are a lot of £6m stands in this division. We have put the money on the field. Our stadium is an old stadium but supporters don't mind getting wet through if the team is winning. If we get where we want to - and Fulham can be a Premiership club - we will probably build a new stadium [on the same site] but initially we will invest on the field."

This argument ignores the economics of stand-building, heavily financed by Football Trust grants, against team-building but Al Fayed's investment is not just short-term. Fulham are searching for their own training ground and expanding their youth system to, ideally, include an academy.

This, and the proposed new ground, is all part of Kevin Keegan's mandate as chief operating officer but he still gets involved on the training ground. Earlier, he had taken Paul Peschisolido aside for an intensive session and Wilkins said: "He does a lot of individual bits with players and they have benefited from it."

"Kevin has an overall look on the club. Obviously we discuss the transfer situation, players coming in and going out, but I pick the side and, with [former QPR manager] Frank Sibley, deal with the first team."

Wilkins' contact with Al Fayed has been limited to a handful of meetings but he noted: "He comes to the home games, he's starting to enjoy himself and that is important for him. He's had a very, very difficult period: there has been a lot on his mind. Now he's enjoying his football, it's a break for him, and that's a bit of a bonus."

Get back to where you once belonged

IF MY knowledge of music serves me right, and it was *Odyssey* who sang about packing up their boots and going back to their roots, then they must have had an insight into the mentality of footballers.

Because as much as football likes to portray itself as a forward-thinking industry, it also likes to keep one boot planted firmly in the past by looking back nostalgically at the misguided hope of being able to recreate former glories, conveniently forgetting the old adage that things are seldom as good the second time around.

That said, there are exceptions that prove the rule. Going back is OK, for instance, if you are Steve Clarke and were released prematurely by your hometown club as a teenager when Alan Ball was in charge.

Going back is probably OK if you are Alan Ball and you took Portsmouth down last time (Ball admittedly got Pompey promoted to the top flight in the first place, but it was short-lived to say the least) so things cannot really get much worse this time.

Can they? Going back is OK, too, if you are Peter Beardsley and were all intents and purposes being put out to grass at St James' Park

(although Beardsley was still better than most of the players Kenny Dalglish has put out onto grass at Newcastle).

And if you are Graeme Le Saux and have metamorphosed from unconvincing winger into roaming full-back while you were away.

And going back is definitely OK if you are Julian Dicks and should never have gone away from Upton Park in the first place. Dicks, whose spell at Liverpool was short and not at all sweet, is not nicknamed the terminator for nothing.

However, going back was not OK for Dicks' erstwhile team-mate, Tony Cottee. Cottee says that when he left West Ham he never thought he would be back.

"I felt I had done as much as I could there and that was going to a big club where I would score lots of goals and win the Championship and play for England," he says, which would have been alright had Cottee not chosen to sign for Everton.

But while he described his return as "coming home", others saw it differently, the Hammers fanzine calling Cottee "a poor shadow of the once prolific doyen of Upton Park".

Similar sentiments could be applied to Jürgen Klinsmann, who started the rot this season,



OLIVIA BLAIR
ON PLAYERS
WHO RETURN
TO THEIR OLD
HUNTING GROUND

The German's prodigal son could return to White Hart Lane was the best thing to have happened to Spurs all season, but that says more about the club's season than about its form.

The fact he had recently been substituted at Sampdoria in favour of, er, Daniele D'Addio should have been enough of a clue; as it is, his impact at Spurs has been minimal - no dive, no bicycle kick, one goal in seven games, a few nice touches and another horrific facial injury.

No, the first time was always going to be the sweetest, for sure. That's something

Ian Wright and Richard Gough would do well to remember. Wright claimed recently that he would not mind ending his days at Crystal Palace, a statement which smacked more of him realising his Highbury boneyard is nearing its end than of any overwhelming affection for his former south London club.

Gough, meanwhile, won nine consecutive League titles with Rangers before pledging his future to Kansas City Wizards. That future lasted just three months, until Gough was persuaded to return to a Rangers side that looks a patch on its former self: struggling to contain the challenge of Hearts at the top of the table, and with hardly a Scotman in sight. Ten-in-a-row will be more of a struggle than nine ever was.

Then of course there is Howard Kendall, back for a third spell at Everton, who had previously sacked Joe Royle (where he was cast in the role of saviour of the club he used to play for) because he wasn't up to the job.

Now Royle has reappeared at Maine Road, cast in the role of saviour of the club he used to play for. (Any minute now and he will be bringing in a former City defender as his assistant.) Perhaps Royle thinks

being an ex-Blue will stand him in good stead. For City's sake let us hope so, but it was not much of an advantage to Peter Reid in the long run.

And it is doubtful to be much of an advantage to Diego Maradona should he eventually claim the role of Napoli's president/player-manager he is rumoured to covet so much.

Maradona is still a legend in Napoli, whom he inspired to two Scudetti, one UEFA Cup (in 1989) and one Italian Cup.

But the club have gone through three managers this season, have won just two games and are rock bottom of Serie A. They need a miracle, never mind Maradona, to save them now.

Perhaps the secret is never to leave in the first place, although that is unrealistic in a game as transient as football and anyway, Matt Le Tissier is proof that you only truly learn to fly by spreading your wings. Unless you are Steve Bull, that is.

But football players and managers tend to be fairly insecure people who in times of need will always gravitate towards their former successful stamping grounds. They would do well to realise that cover versions are seldom as good as the original.

Fall and rise of princes of wails

MATCHDAY mornings were a magic day for me as a kid. On waking I'd leap out of bed and test the stretchability of my 100 per cent polyester nightwear by releasing a stinging shot on an imaginary ball in the style of Tommy Tynan, the greatest striker this country has ever seen.

Every League club has their striker hero, and from the late 1970s to 1983 Tommy was the King of Somerton Park and Newport County. That was when Newport were lower League; 10 years down the line the words "non-League" now appear before my team's name - although this change of circumstance, and of name, was a full decade of misery away at this stage.

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I clearly remember my first game and on that day grandly announcing to my grandfather (like my father, a lifelong County fan) that I was going to Newport County Stadium, only for them to exchange guffaws. This was my first inkling that all was not what I thought it may be.

But I was not disappointed when I got there. We held Grimsby Town 1-1 that magical day and I was in awe of being in the middle of a group of grown men while being allowed to hear them swear and pretend to understand their jokes about the centre-half with the big arse.

FAN'S EYE VIEW NO 245
NEWPORT AFC BY ANDREW HUMPHRIES

man side Carl-Zeiss Jena. In East Germany our brave lads got a draw and we were confident for the second leg. But they beat us 1-0.

We murdered them that night and everyone lost count of the number of goal-line clearances they made. Only the absence of a Russian linesman stopped us getting the goal that would have taken us to the Stadium of Light and a semi-final with Benfica. At the final whistle my chubby cheeks burned with

tears of disbelief, my time of innocence at an end.

Not long afterwards, our fortunes took a turn for the worse and, to cut a long, sad story short, we had to resort to not only selling our best players to survive, as had always been the case, but also our worst players. We sold the ground, the tea urn, the reserve team kit and club cat, all in a bid to boost the club's coffers. All to no avail.

In the final years we went through more demotions than a sergeant caught in bed with the colonel's wife.

But from the ashes of the County came a new team. The imaginatively named Newport AFC came and stole my heart. Through several years of promotion, relegation, being exiled to England by the Welsh FA and having Somerton Park demolished they have come through with flying colours. Well, drifting colours anyway. Premiership supporters would not recognise this other world. In our league, away fans can be counted on one hand and the only queues are for the burger van when the onions have cooked. But we've got back our pride and our ambition, we're alive and can show worried supporters of the likes of Doncaster and Brighton that life can go on after humiliation and despair.

كلها من أندية

Chasing pack not yet pursuing a lost cause

THE sight of Manchester United looking down on the entire Premiership, seven points clear with less than a third of the season remaining, is a persuasive argument for the view that their rivals are now playing for the right to be regarded as the best of the rest.

The late Billy Bremner once wrote a book titled *You Get Now For Being Second*, which is of course no longer true. The runners-up place now brings participation in the lucrative European Champions' League and is therefore not to be sniffed at. But despite the collective failure of Liverpool, Chelsea, Blackburn and Arsenal to take advantage of United's poor run since Christmas, it may be premature for

any of their number to start mentally conceding the title.

Alex Ferguson suggested after United's 2-0 win at Aston Villa in midweek that the champions' performance had been their best since Boxing Day, with the exception of the 5-3 FA Cup victory at Chelsea. That may have been true, yet only in the context of their sub-standard displays against Coventry, Southampton, Leicester, Bolton and Barnsley. It could not disguise the fact that United were desperately ordinary until the final 15 minutes.

Todays, with that important win behind them and back at Old Trafford, another three points might appear to be a formality. However, Derby's record against United, out to

The destination of the Premiership is not yet a foregone conclusion, says Phil Shaw, while Nick Harris (below) gives a match-by-match analysis of the weekend's action

mention their pressing need for European Cup in mind, Ferguson has rested key players. Now, with virtually a full pool to choose from, he is likely to send out his strongest side.

Smith held back Francesco Baiano last weekend, although he is surely too influential not to play today.

For Arsène Wenger, juggling resources is a necessity. Because of injuries and international calls, the Arsenal manager is having trouble finding 11 fit men for the home fixture with Crystal Palace. Even Dennis Bergkamp, whose fear of flying meant he stayed behind when Marc Overmars went

with the Dutch squad to the United States, is struggling.

It is hardly the ideal preparation for two meetings with Palace in four days (the second is Wednesday's FA Cup replay) which could well define Arsenal's season. Despite the Coca-Cola Cup exit at Stamford Bridge, a win today, plus another in their match in hand, would leave them at worst three points behind United.

After the excitement of taking Chelsea to Wembley in his first match in charge, Gianfranco Vialli comes down to earth at Leicester. There is a symbolic symmetry to the Italian's first

match as Gullit's successor being at Filbert Street. It was there, 18 months ago, that he found himself relegated to the bench for the first time.

On that occasion, Vialli came on after half-time and scored immediately. Today, in the absence of Ed de Goey, he must choose between Dmitri Kharin and Kevin Hitchcock for the goalkeeper's jersey, knowing the Russian has already stated his intention to leave if he does not regain his place.

Blackburn's challenge continues at Southampton, where they last won 60 years ago. They will be thankful not to facing

such spectacular progress that it will rank as a major upset if Barnsley end 75 years without a win at Highfield Road.

Strachan, whom Chelsea's new player-manager cited with Ferguson and Wenger as the three to whose standards he aspired, must decide whether to restore the snip of the season, George Boateng, after the £250,000 midfielder's absence with the Dutch Under-21s.

As the man who once said that if he had made Eric Cantona's remarks about sardines and trawlers, people would have thought he was "just a wee Scottish bus talking crap", we can safely assume that Strachan will not be discussing on the merits or otherwise of squad rotation.

Arsenal v C Palace

Bergkamp 16 Leading scorer Sheringham 6
Last season: No fixture

Arsenal's injury problems mean teenage centre back Matthew Upson will get his second Premiership start and youngsters Ishai Rankin and Jason Crowe may also be in contention for places. Tony Adams and Chris Wreh are both serving bans while winger Marc Overmars is in America with the Dutch national squad. David Seaman and Ian Wright are still out injured and midfielder Ray Parlour is ruled out with hamstring trouble. Dennis Bergkamp, Nigel Winterburn and Gilles Grimandi all face late fitness tests after the Coca-Cola Cup defeat at Chelsea in mid-week. Martin Keown returns to the squad. Crystal Palace manager Steve Coppell adds strikers Marcus Bent and Matt Jansen to the squad which drew at Arsenal in the FA Cup last weekend. Both recent signings were cup tied last week but Bent has a good chance of making the starting line-up tomorrow. Jansen picked up a dead-leg in a reserve game earlier this week and is doubtful to make his debut. Michele Padovano and Attilio Lombardo are at least a week away from returning, while Neil Shipperley and Paul Warhurst will not start training for another three weeks.

Bolton v West Ham

Blake 10 Leading scorer Harrison 19
Last season: No fixture

Bolton will be without Scott Sellars, who begins a two-game ban today. Manager Colin Todd will decide between John Sheridan and Michael Johansen for the vacant position. Striker Dean Holdsworth will return after a 12 week absence with knee and calf injuries to replace Bob Taylor who has returned to West Bromwich after a month's loan with the Wanderers. Scott Taylor has returned after a loan spell with Rotherham. Bolton will be hoping to produce a performance on a par with the one that gave them a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford a fortnight ago as they look for a first Premiership win since 1 December.

West Ham manager Harry Redknapp will give late fitness tests to John Moncur and Tim Bresnan who both have groin problems. Paul Kitson is definitely ruled out with a similar injury but David Unsworth returns to the side after a hamstring problem. Both Samasi Abou and Steve Lomas are suspended with extra one-match bans imposed by the Football Association for laying hands on referees as they were being sent off in previous games.

Coventry v Barnsley

Dublin 16 Leading scorer Redman 10
Last season: No fixture

Gordon Strachan has selection dilemmas as Coventry look for a club record six-match winning sequence. Paul Telfer, Richard Shaw and George Boateng are all available again and Strachan has to decide whether to recall them. If Shaw plays, Dion Dublin will be moved from his emergency defender role back up front. Boateng returns from Dutch Under-21 duty and Telfer is back from suspension. Strachan may be reluctant to make sweeping changes from the team which won 2-1 at The Dell in midweek.

Barnsley manager Danny Wilson has defensive problems. Arjan de Zeeuw (groin) and Ales Krizan (knee) are doubtful starters and Chris Morgan and Darren Barnard are suspended. Peter Markstedt is likely to be given his first start for five weeks and Scott Jones is added to the squad. Striker Jan-Age Fjortoft should replace John Hendrie up front after being cup-tied, although the Scot is also struggling with a calf strain. Wilson, meanwhile, is currently involved in talks with four players - De Zeeuw, Jovo Bosanic, Clint Marcele and Neil Thompson - who are all out of contract at the end of the season.

Leicester v Chelsea

Marshall 8 Leading scorer Vialli 15
Last season: 1-3

Theo Zagorakis could make his full debut for Leicester today as they look to maintain the recent steady form that has seen two wins and three draws in the last five games. Zagorakis is expected to be handed a place in midfield because Garry Parker is almost certainly out with bruised ribs. The Frenchman Peggy Arpheaud continues in goal for Kasey Keller who is on international duty. Steve Walsh, recovering from a groin injury, could be on the bench after missing the last two games.

Chesterfield goalkeeper Kevin Hitchcock will make his first Premiership start in a year as the Blue's aim to keep up championship pressure on Manchester United. Hitchcock's last league start came against United on February 22 last year, but with Ed de Goey away on international duty he will play at Filbert Street. Player-manager Gianluca Vialli may put himself on the bench after the exertions of the midweek Coca-Cola Cup win over Arsenal, with Tore Andre Flo coming in. Eddie Newton is in contention for a place as well, while Frank Sinclair (calf) remains doubtful.

Man Utd v Derby

Cole 21 Leading scorer Wanchope 13
Last season: 2-3

Manchester United will be without Ole Gunnar Solskjær, who has failed to recover from the virus which has kept him out for two games, and Ronny Johnsen, who is ruled out by a calf strain. Alex Ferguson has otherwise a virtually full squad from which to select his team. England midfielder Paul Scholes is available after a two-match suspension during which he had treatment on an injury picked up on international duty. The champions will be looking to build on their 2-0 midweek win over Aston Villa and recover from the poor form that had seen just one win in five games prior Wednesday.

Francesco Baiano returns to Derby's attack. The £1.5m summer signing from Fiorentina was rested at Everton last Saturday. "He was looking a bit tired and I thought he needed a break," said manager Jim Smith. "The foreign players find it hard at this stage of the season because every game in this League is physically and mentally hard." Baiano replaces Ron Willems, and, with the Danish defender Jacob Laursen out for two weeks after keyhole surgery on his right knee, Gary Rowett again plays in central defence.

...And statistics

Kendall aims to extend Everton's record



Shouting the odds:
Everton hope to be the
big noise on Merseyside
again on Monday

After the disappointment of their Coca-Cola Cup exit on Wednesday, one of the last things Liverpool needed was a Merseyside derby. On Monday, however, Everton visit Anfield in the Premiership, bringing with them a remarkable recent record in fixtures between the two sides.

While Liverpool have enjoyed much more success overall than their neighbours in recent years, Everton are unbeaten in their last seven Premiership Merseyside derbies. Since Roy

Evans won his first Premiership derby match in charge of Liverpool - a 2-1 victory at Anfield in March 1994 - he has failed to win any of the subsequent seven.

The one crumb of statistical consolation for Liverpool is that Howard Kendall, now in his third reign at Goodison Park, has lost his last four league derbies against Liverpool at Anfield; the most recent was in his second spell and the previous three were in his first.

The problem for Everton supporters is that Merseyside derbies are about the only area of the game in which they claim superiority over their old rivals these days. Since Everton's championship in 1987, Liverpool have always finished above their rivals. Even the Joe Royle-inspired revival of two seasons ago saw Everton finish three places below Liverpool.

Goodison fans hoping that Kendall can lead the club back to the good times enjoyed during his first spell, when Everton won the championship twice, will not be encouraged by the statistical analysis of his three reigns.

Everton's average number of points per game has dropped from 1.79 in his first spell to 1.33 in his second and 1.08 in the third.

The three reigns of King Kendall at Goodison Park

	Games	Points	Points average
1987-1991	252	452	1.79
1990-1993	129	171	1.33
Since 1997	26	28	1.08

Roy Evans' Anfield record

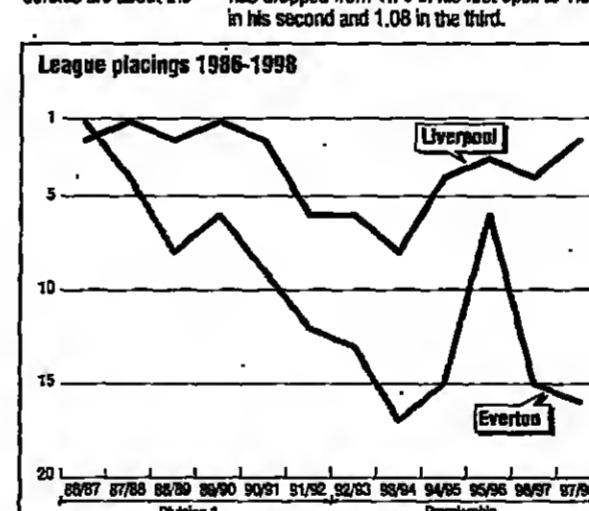
	Games	Points	Points average
Since 1994	160	276	1.72

Kendall's record in Merseyside League derbies

P	W	D	L	F	A
19	6	4	9	19	50

Evans' record in Merseyside League derbies

P	W	D	L	F	A
8	1	4	4	8	10



FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: HOW THEY STAND

	Home	Away	Form	Upcoming matches	
R	Pts	GD	W D L F A	(most recent on right)	
1	Plus Obj	26	53	+35 30 7 1 6 5 4 12	WLDWL
2	Liverpool	26	46	+19 9 1 4 28 8 4 6 2 16 12	DWDLD
3	Leeds	25	45	+25 8 1 4 27 7 4 6 2 17 17	DWDWL
4	Blackburn	25	45	+17 8 3 2 30 5 4 6 2 14 0	DLWDL
5	Arsenal	24	44	+18 9 2 1 26 9 3 5 2 16 17	DWDWL
6	Derby	26	42	+9 9 3 1 25 8 3 3 7 16 24	WDWLW
7	Leeds	25	38	+16 5 3 4 26 8 3 1 10 11 27	WWLWD
8	West Ham	25	38	+2 9 1 1 26 8 3 1 10 11 27	WWLWD
9	Leicester	26	37	-16 5 3 7 18 8 3 5 7 17 17	DWDWL
10	Coventry	26	33	-4 1 5 7 20 11 3 2 8 11 21	LWLWL
11	Newcastle	25	32	-5 6 3 15 5 5 3 2 8 10 15	LWLWL
12	Southampton	26	31	-8 7 1 5 20 16 2 3 8 10 21	WWLWL
13	Sheff Wed	26	31	-11 6 4 4 26 7 5 3 10 11 25	WLDWL
14	Aston Villa	26	30	-9 5 3 5 17 18 3 3 7 10 18	DLLWL
15	Wimbledon	24	29	-2 4 3 12 16 16 2 5 7 3 21	DLDWL
16	Everton	26	28	-8 5 2 5 18 18 2 5 7 3 21	WWDDL
17	Nottingham	26	27	-17 5 4 4 26 7 5 3 10 11 25	WFLWL
18	C Palace	25	23	-16 0 4 8 7 23 5 4 4 H H	DLLL
19	Bolton	25	23	-15 2 3 12 10 12 2 1 10 8 39	EDDOL
20	Barnsley	25	22	-39 4 3 5 4 22 2 1 10 8 39	WLWLD

FAIR PLAY LEAGUE

Referee	Games	Red	Yellow	Pts	Ave

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SPORT

ELEVEN
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PAGE 16

Saturday 21 February 1998 ■

Fallon told me he stopped Top Cees, says TV presenter

Racing

By Richard Edmondson and Greg Wood

THE LIBEL trial which is currently the focus of the racing world was yesterday told by Derek Thompson, the Channel 4 racing presenter, that Kieren Fallon, the champion jockey, told him that he had deliberately prevented the horse from winning the race in question on the instructions of Jack Ramsden, the husband of the horse's trainer, Lynda Fallon, subsequently recalled to the witness box, denied the suggestion.

Fallon and the Ramsdens are suing *The Sporting Life* over an unsigned editorial in May 1995 after the horse, Top Cees, won the Chester Cup. The editorial suggested all three had "stopped" the fancied Top Cees three weeks earlier in the Swaffham Handicap at Newmarket. Mirror Group Newspapers, publishers of *The*

Sporting Life, deny libel. They say the article was justified and fair comment on a "scandal" that was a matter of public interest.

The newspaper's counsel, Richard Hartley QC - who had earlier said that his best evidence would be if he could produce someone who had overheard someone telling Fallon not to win at Newmarket - asked Thompson in the High Court in London for his reaction to the result of the Swaffham Handicap.

Thompson, who was subpoenaed on his return from working in Dubai on Monday, said he felt that the horse "probably should have finished an awful lot closer with a more forceful ride, and probably should have won".

On the night of the race, he was dining with friends at the Old Plough pub near Newmarket, when he saw Fallon. He told the court: "I don't want to repeat this in open court, which is why I've tried to stop it coming to open court because it was said to me in confidence. I was asking

"What happened with Top Cees this afternoon as I thought he would win" and Kieren's words were, "Yes, I thought the horse would win as well but when I got into the paddock Jack told me to stop it".

"It might have been said flippantly, he might have had a couple too many. I am just repeating what he said to me one night in the pub."

Thompson said that he mentioned the conversation to a couple of people at the next morning's Channel Four production meeting and suggested it might be worth interviewing Fallon, as Top Cees' failure was a major racing story.

Kieren was obviously quite reluctant... he was being hounded by the press, if that's the right word, so I said: 'It will do you good to talk about it.'

"I did say that what was said last night in the Plough will not come out and I will look after you," he added: "I knew Kieren as a very good jockey, although

not socially. I admired him greatly as a super horseman."

He said he was reluctant to become involved in the case because he had no desire to get involved with litigation between people he knew on both sides. "It's as simple as that. I did not want this to come out."

Patrick Milmo QC, for the Ramsdens and Fallon, opened his cross-examination by saying: "What you have just told the court about Kieren Fallon is an outrageous lie - that's right, is it not?"

Thompson: "If you think so, that's up to you. But no, it's not."

Milmo: "I'm putting that to you, Mr Thompson, I want you to face it. My question is what you have just said about Kieren Fallon, sitting down there on that front bench, is an outrageous lie."

Thompson: "That is incorrect."

Milmo alleged that Thompson had been "boasting" to his Channel 4 colleagues that Fallon had confided in him about being told to pull Top Cees.

Thompson: "The word 'boasting' is not correct."

He said that what was said by him in the production meeting was confidential. "It's the same reason you might talk to people in chambers. It was off the record and you would be annoyed if it was reported elsewhere."

Fallon himself was recalled to the stand to rebut Thompson's version of events at the Old Plough. "I wouldn't have said anything like that," Fallon told Milmo. "I wouldn't call Mr Ramsden 'Jack'. I'd call him Mr Ramsden."

Later, Milmo asked if there was any truth in the allegation that he had deliberately stopped Top Cees winning.

"No," Fallon said. "Something like that would be terrible. For any jockey to even think about stopping a horse would jeopardise their career. What Mr Thompson has invented is a lie. Mr Ramsden has never asked me to stop a horse as long as I've ridden for him, or Mrs Ramsden for that matter."

Cross-examined by Hartley, he denied that it would be easy for a rider of his ability to stop a horse. "You could find trouble, not take the gaps?" Hartley asked. "You're going at 35 miles per hour, three inches from the horse in front." Fallon replied. "You don't look for trouble, you try to avoid it."

After he left school at 17, he gained first-hand experience of horses, working for periods of six months each for the Bishop Auckland trainer Denys Morris and Pierre Sanoner at Chantilly, and rode in several amateur races on the Flat and over jumps, famously beating the Prince Of Wales in a close finish at Plumpton in 1980 for his only victory.

Matiness of the man with a mike

DEREK THOMPSON, the racing journalist whose evidence in *The Sporting Life* libel trial caused such a stir yesterday, is best-known as the member of the Channel 4 team whose watchwords might be: have mike, will interview.

Thompson, 47, has established a reputation that he will talk to anyone, indeed to anything - from the champion jockey to a goat. His wide range and untrustworthy manner have some praising his consummate professionalism, others reaching for the sick tag.

Thompson's style is veneer-smooth - it has been said he is veneer all the way through - with an almost permanently fixed smile (false at times, he admits) and a manner that is sometimes undeniably patronising. He tends to give the lightweight, off-beat spots on Channel 4 and aims for populist appeal, but he is by no means everyone's cup of tea.

The biographical blurb on the inside flap of the cover of his recently published book *Tomorrow's Year* gives his nickname as "The Master of the Microphone". Many, however, know him as "The Nodding Dog", a reference to the constant head-bobbing that accompanies many interviews, or "Toilet" Thompson.

Sue Montgomery
on the reporter
who will talk to
anyone, or anything

son. The goat, a racehorse's companion, is to blame for the latter as viewers were informed: "Oh look, it's doing a pooh."

"Tommyballs" are legion, and Lester Piggott, never one to waste words, apparently told him to "F*** off" in front of a worldwide audience of hundreds of millions on Derby Day in 1983.

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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3540, Saturday 21 February

By Phi

ACROSS

- Developed an artistic sense (something not shared by everyone) (8,5)
- Oce again appearing as new in turbulent art scene (9)
- Murphy runs behind gallery (5)
- See female in sun bonnet in ray of sunlight (5)
- Pursuing about "alternative" clothes (9)
- Not breaking the law, locating home in Orkney Island (7)
- Fanatic adult that is lacking first signs of wit and nous (7)
- Wife, having obligations about arrival (7)
- Disreputable alley in very loud surroundings - here's a little of the volume (3-4)
- Ambitious type - one of the jet-set? (4-5)
- Lad hangs around Post Office to trifle amorously (5)
- Peak imprisons one making a row (5)
- Just time to get into US University? That's a fief! (9)
- Tennis on the radio perhaps provokes disagreement (4,2,3,4)

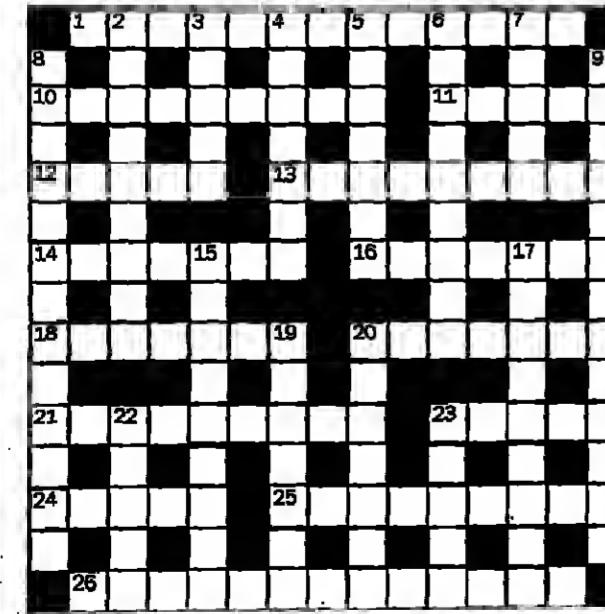
This first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened next Friday's solution. Last Saturday's solution

DOWN

- Unfortunate reaction when injecting new pot? (9)
- On horseback, and ready for a fall? (5)
- "Later arrival - regret losing power" - railway (3-5)
- Director-General restricts what's excessive in meeting points (7)
- It'll involve moon, star and galaxy ultimately (9)
- No good avoiding showing disapproval together (5)
- It shows you a shade angry over egg production (5-8)
- One itching to send ball flying! (7-6)
- An inflexible attitude infests heads of some firms, unfortunately (9)
- Use "parrot" loosely for this old flying creature (9)
- What can do for such a meal - can small fish? (4-3)
- Supply vase to be put in angle (7)
- Forbidding the introduction of erotic fifth (5)
- Pen a couple of letters in a certain manner (5)

Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution

ANSURAH NEWWORLD
AA ALIY THE
RELEVANCE ITALY
DLES D B T L J
VAIN JOURNEYMAN
AV SOS G
REACTOR WRATH
KNA U R I
STIFLE FACTION
L F A E S V
INCINERATE KNEE
T Q U A F H N I
MAYOR CRUSADING
U P S H L L A L
SQUEEGEE COLLIE

ONWARD MOREBID
S B H O V L E
TINNITYUS DECOMP
U O F G C H O C O L A T E
BOX OF CHOCOLATES
T L O C A L
POLEMISE PAINT
U A N N
BASIS MOTORIST
O E O R O U
UNINTENTIONALLY
N N T P C O V A
DDLE L I N L E U M
E S U E I W R S
RESORI C Y G N E N



Chris Hewett (centre) 'needs to punch his weight' against Wales at Twickenham today

Photograph: David Ashdown

Woodward faces watershed

Chris Hewett
Rugby Union Correspondent

THIS IS IT, the sink or swim, do or die, put up or shut up moment. Clive Woodward could not have imagined things would reach such a pretty pass so soon in his tenure as England coach; indeed, it is perfectly possible that he does not consider today's Five Nations dust-up with Wales to be a watershed occasion at all. In which case, he sees things rather differently to the 78,000 who will sit in the stands at Twickenham this afternoon.

Woodward is not on trial to the degree that Jack Rowell found himself on that win-or-hustle Calcutta Cup day in Edinburgh two years ago. But defeat at the hands of the Welsh would not only signal the end of a long honeymoon with an English sporting public swept off its feet by seductive words, it would also set the tone for an old-fashioned door-slammimg, furniture-throwing domestic with Wales.

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As indeed, will the performance of England's back five.

Martin Johnson is on a human

and for all Utley's pseudobabble about staleness and burnout, it is high time the Lions captain raised a gallop

and concentrated on punching

successive "bad one". What Lawrence Dallaglio and company need is an extremely "good one", just to see off a Welsh side unusually confident of translating their paper potential to the green grass of the playing field.

It is 20 years since the sevo wonders of the valleys - Gareth, Gerald, Phil, JPR and the Pontypool front row -

bestrode the rugby landscape

and seldom since have the red shirts roared across the Severn in such high spirits.

Arwel Thomas, the magically

gifted outside-half from Swansea, articulated the feel-good factor this week by saying: "If the pack gives us some runable ball, we'll win. We have more idea behind the scrum because we've got better players, man for man, from nine to 15."

"England have played all the

top-quality sides under Woodward

and shown signs of moving away from the kicking game but if winning is a habit, it's a habit they don't have at the moment. We definitely fancy this one at the Rugby Football Union.

It is now seven Tests since

England's sweet chariot made

it all the way to the chequered flag and the record of the Woodward regime is two draws and three defeats from five outings. No one is on the phone to Dial-a-Humble just at the moment - New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and France are the Real McCoy's of world rugby, after all - but today, the coach takes on a second-class power for the first time. As Roger Utley, the England manager, admitted this week, a had one against Wales will inevitably lead to "questions being asked in high places."

Worryingly for Woodward, it

is not merely a question of

England avoiding a second

defeat in a row.

Replacements: 16 M Catt (Bath); 17 P de Glanville (Bath); 18 M Dawson (Northampton); 19 A Davenport (Grosvenor); 20 C Stephens (Bridgend); 21 L Pearce (London Wasps); 22 J Humphreys (Cardiff). Referee: C Hawke (New Zealand)

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ENGLAND v WALES

M Perry	Twickenham
D Rees	Bath
W Greenwood	Leicester
J Guscott	Bath
A Healey	Leicester
P Grayson	Northampton
K Bracken	Saracens
J Leonard	Harlequins
R Cockrell	Leicester
P Vickery	Gloucester
M Johnson	Leicester
L Dallaglio	Newcastle
N Back	Leicester
R Hill	Saracens
	Replacements: 16 M Catt (Bath); 17 P de Glanville (Bath); 18 M Dawson (Northampton); 19 A Davenport (Grosvenor); 20 C Stephens (Bridgend); 21 L Pearce (London Wasps); 22 J Humphreys (Cardiff).
	Referee: C Hawke (New Zealand)
	Kick-off: 2.00 (Sky Sports 2)

the year 2000 - a new tournament for a new millennium.

Rugby Football Union council members agreed unanimously to extend the competition to the rest of the northern hemisphere rugby yesterday by officially inviting Italy to the Five Nations party. The oldest international championship in the game will become the Six Nations from the spring of 1999.

Three-point victory over the new boys only a fortnight ago.

Vernon Pugh, a Five Nations Committee member, congratulated Giancarlo Dondi, the president of the Italian Rugby Union. "This must be a very proud day for him," said Pugh.

"We were all very impressed by the professional and persuasive arguments made by the Ital-

ians both on and off the field."

The deserving Italians will be the first Five Nations newcomers since France, who were granted a place in 1910.

England's top clubs reached agreement with the Rugby Football Union yesterday over plans to extend Allied Dunbar Premiership One by two clubs to 14 next season. With no negotiation this season, the news comes as a major boost to Bristol and London Irish, who currently occupy the bottom two positions in Premiership One.

EVEN
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PORT
EGIN
ON
GE 16

PERSONAL FINANCE NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR



YOUR MONEY

PERSONAL FINANCE, PROPERTY & MOTORING

Saturday 21 February 1998



Watch this space: It's time to liven up your living space with an unusual clock. Timekeepers for every taste and budget, in 'Property' on page 10

Photograph: Tom Pilston

Learn lessons from the master money makers

Only a handful of professionals outperform the markets consistently over time. But, as Jonathan Davis explains, they make investors a fortune

Who would not want to be a professional investment manager? On the face of it, there are few better jobs to be had. After football players and pop stars, there are few industries in which the top performers are so handsomely rewarded. The bull market of the past 15 years has made the profession one of the most highly sought after in the City. Salaries for those who can demonstrate that they are one of the handful of truly exceptional talents can easily run into the high six figures, with matching bonuses on top.

Investment is one of the most highly competitive businesses on Earth and to produce exceptional returns year in, year out is at least as great a challenge as winning an Olympic medal. A handful of professionals do, however, have what the Nobel economics laureate Paul Samuelson calls the elusive extra "performance quotient".

Having spent a year on an in-depth study of eight of the most successful professional investors in

Britain, with the idea of trying to establish what have been the major factors behind their success, I can report that the qualities you need to succeed in this demanding business are not the ones which the ordinary investor might at first imagine. The eight looked at include some of the best-known names in the business.

All these investors have the same objective: to produce returns that exceed those of the market as a whole. But their way of setting about doing so could not be more different. All of them are versed in the art of balance-sheet analysis. All have their own distinctive valuation techniques, which they are happy to describe in detail.

Some, such as Anthony Bolton and Jim Slater, are out-and-out stockpickers. They look for exceptionally performing shares, rather than taking overall views on the direction of markets.

Bolton is big on detailed company research. His two funds, which cover the UK and Europe, specialise in

finding out-of-favour companies that other investors are shunning for one reason or another; something formerly owned by Robert Maxwell, or nuclear power companies which nobody understands, are the sort of things he loves. Such shares are often irrationally undervalued and make large gains when they return to favour.

Slater has his own screening system for finding growth shares that are not yet fully valued by the market, based initially on the ratio between their earnings and the rating those earnings are accorded in the market. He likes to back broad investment themes (such as the spread of sports retailing and the Millennium bug) and also keeps a very close eye on directors' share dealings. His "Zulu Principle" holds that you do best by sticking to a few companies you can really become an expert on rather than trying to work out how entire industries or the economy as a whole is moving.

Other investors prefer to take a broader view. Mark Mobius, a 60-year-old fitness freak, spends 80 per cent of his time flying around the globe in a private jet looking for bargains in more than 30 different emerging markets. Ian Rushbrook, who runs Personal Assets in Edinburgh, uses his own sophisticated computer models to help him try and decide if the markets are over-valued or not.

Nils Taube, Sir Jacob Rothschild's stock market adviser, specialises in spotting broad international trends that can be expected to head towards the UK and Europe. He was one of the first, 30 years ago, to spot the huge potential growth in supermarkets: now he is busy making money from betting on the continued consolidation of Europe's financial and banking systems.

So no two methods for success are the same. As Anthony Bolton told me: "If you are going to out-perform the market, by definition you have to do something which is different

from what everyone else is doing."

It all sounds very easy, at least until you try to do it. Going against conventional opinion is something most of us find difficult to do. That is why many successful investors are essentially loners.

The paradox is that there is much less mystique about investment than is often realised. Some of the adages you need to succeed – for example, to run your profits and cut your losses – are almost as old as the hills. Yet few of us actually follow the advice. Buying the most popular shares in the markets, for example those with the highest price-earnings ratios, have been repeatedly shown to be a surefire route to long-term under-performance. Yet most investors, many professionals included, persist in doing just that.

In principle, there is no reason, most of the experts insist, why private investors cannot do just as well as the average professional investor. Although their information sources

are not so good, they have the advantages of having smaller funds to manage. They can afford to take a genuinely long-term view, a luxury that is in practice denied to most professional investment managers. In Anthony Bolton's words, there is actually very little original thought in investment. It is putting the wisdom of the ages into practice that is so difficult. Putting your money with the genuine superstars, provided you can spot them early enough, is just as good a strategy for long-term success in the stock market as any.

'Money Makers', by The Independent's Jonathan Davis, a study of Britain's most successful professional investors, and what ordinary investors can learn from them, is published by Orion Business Books at £20. To order a copy at the specially discounted price of £15 (including P&P) call 01903 736736 and quote the reference number MMJD.

INSIDE

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2/PERSONAL FINANCE

CLIFFORD
GERMAN

Budget on a rates rise

Freshly armed with a five-year mandate as the Inflation-Finder General, Eddie George can now afford to make long-term decisions on interest rates. But he is unlikely to want to change interest rates until he and his colleagues on the monetary committee have seen what the Chancellor does with the tax weapon in the Budget.

Interest rates and tax rates are two blades of the scissors the authorities traditionally use to trim the economy. Higher taxes and higher interest rates both slow the economy down while tax cuts and interest-rate cuts will speed it up, but tax changes and interest-rate changes work in slightly different ways because higher interest rates reward savers as well as penalising borrowers, while higher taxes reduce spending power across the whole economy and also reduce the government's budget deficit.

On past experience, tax changes affect spending and investment within a year whereas the Bank of England argues that changing interest rates can take up to two

years to work through the system. Interest rates seem to have more impact on inflation and exchange rates, but if there is a right time to raise taxes it is in the early years of a government when the next election is far away.

Some members of the Bank of Eng-

land's monetary committee think another

rise in interest rates is needed to dis-

courage borrowing and consumer spend-

ing and to puncture the inflationary

boom in house prices.

But a rise in interest rates would

make sterling even stronger and hurt

exporters as well as reducing growth in

the next two years and widening the gap

between the UK and Europe at a time

when pro-Europeans want it to narrow.

(How much better, dear reader, if the

incoming Government had done what

this column argued last summer and

raised interest rates sharply to show it

meant to control inflation and, at the

same time, outflank the currency spec-

ulators at a stroke, because by now we

could be reducing rates again to soften

the downturn rather than risking making

it worse.)

Either way the next move is up to the

Chancellor. The business community

would like to see (personal) taxation rise

so that interest rates and sterling could

come down faster, but the record surge

in tax receipts last month has brought the

prospect of a budget surplus in 1999-2000

and there seems to be no need for a general rise in taxation next month.

Increases in tax on petrol and tobacco

are certain, reforms to National Insurance,

capital gains tax and inheritance tax are

likely, tax relief on mortgage interest

might well be phased out, and the married

couples' allowance replaced by a restored

child tax allowance. More tinkering with

the taxation of pensions and savings, in-

cluding firm plans for Individual Savings

Accounts, seems certain and there could

even be tax cuts on booze plus a long-

promised 10p rate of tax.

But the fine-tuning of policy will be left

to left to the Bank of England and its

interest-rate committee.

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MONEY MAKEOVER

Put your capital to work when you retire

Long-term care: Joan Denton does not need to see her income fall drastically after she retires. Photograph: Bryn Colton



Name: Joan Denton

Age: 60

Occupation: Retired

The problem: Joan, from Norfolk, has recently retired and has purchased a house for cash.

She wants to maximise income to bring her as close as possible to her pre-retirement level of £9,500 per annum net, while taking as little risk as possible.

Joan would prefer guaranteed income that would rise over time. Her other concern is that she may require residential care at some point in the future.

Joan's occupational pension scheme income amounts to £2,089 pa, which combined with State pension benefits will provide income of £5,731 pa. She also has an additional voluntary contribution (AVC) fund of £4,378, but is confused as to the options available to her.

Joan has around £65,000 in

a Halifax Gold Account, £20,000 in Premium Bonds and around £4,000 of "emergency" funds split between a Barclays' deposit account and The Saffron Walden building society. Joan

wishes to invest around £85,000 for future income in total.

The Adviser:

Paul Smith,

specialist consultant at Stirling

Asset Management Ltd, 85a

Great Portland Street, London,

WIN 6JR, 0171 580 1555.

The Advice: The simplest part

of Joan's restructuring is the

purchase of an annuity with her

pension AVC pot. Those funds

are held with Equitable Life who

have offered three annuities: a

flat annuity at £340 pa, an an-

nity of £240 pa escalating at 3

per cent pa and an annuity of

£220 pa escalating at the retail

price index (RPI).

Under occupational pension

regulations Joan has no alter-

native other than to buy an

annuity with her AVC fund. The

principles behind an annuity are

straightforward. Buying one is

a bit like a bet with an insurance

company, in return for your cash

they will pay you an income for

life. If you die early they keep

your lump sum and in effect win

the bet, if you live to a ripe old

age, they lose!

But the amount of annuity

offered will vary depending on

the company, the age of the pur-

chaser and the type purchased.

Annuity rates can vary between

companies and may differ by 20

per cent. Shopping around will

pay off every time.

While our main considera-

tion must be income for Joan,

it may be prudent to incorpo-

rate some provision for care.

The life assurance company

Lincoln has devised a more

practical solution with their

Independence Bond, due to

come on the market shortly.

This is in effect an investment

vehicle, but can incorporate a

level of benefits higher than the

amount invested. These bene-

fits will be paid out if the indi-

vidual is unable to undertake

certain activities of daily living,

terminal illness and death. The

cost of that insurance is taken

from the investment fund on a

monthly costed basis.

This may sound expen-

sive, but, in reality, is not if the me-

chanics are understood. For an

investment of £25,000, and a

protection level of £50,000, the

potential risk to the life com-

pany is only £25,000 at outset.

In the early years the investor

has the security of knowing

that a move to residential care

may not erode other assets.

Where Lincoln score with

this product is that it carries an

investment management charge

of 0.25 per cent pa as opposed

to the more normal 1 per cent

industry average. It allows

COLLECT TO INVEST: JOHN WINDSOR

Silver spoons regain their sparkle

Christie's expectation of £100,000-£150,000 for a famous set of 12 silver 17th century apostle spoons next month is a reminder that prices for collectable wrought silver - and apostle spoons in particular - are showing a sharp rise. Although the silver market remained stable during the recession, it has been dull for a decade.

Dating from the 15th century, apostle spoons, with cast and chased terminals representing saints, have risen in value at auction by some 50 per cent in the past couple of years. You can still buy 17th century apostles with unscripted maker's marks for under £500 - if you are lucky - but those whose makers are known have been selling for three and four times estimate.

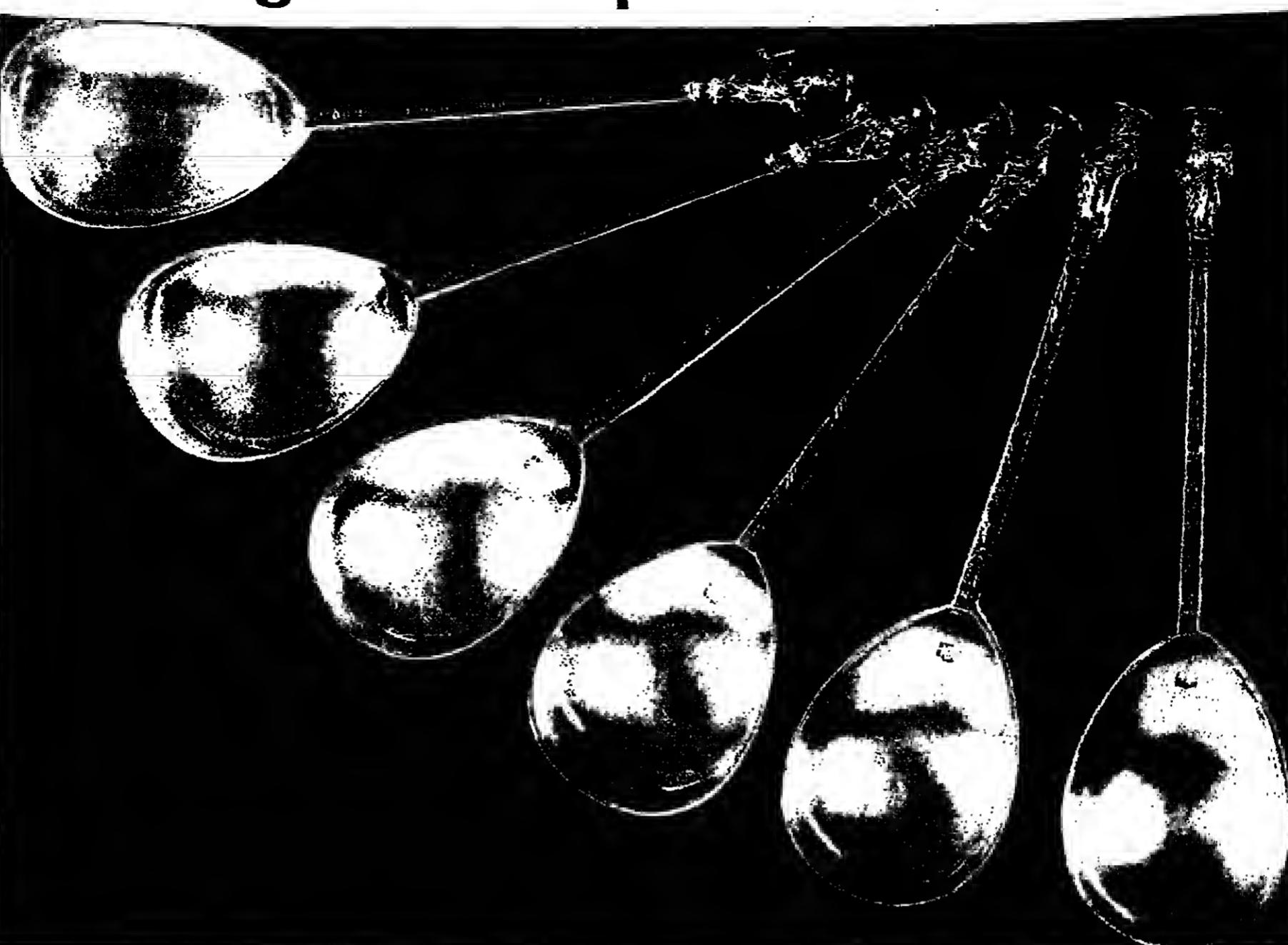
For example, at Sotheby's last July, an English provincial silver-gilt apostle spoon with an unscripted mark of about 1655 sold for a modest £368, towards the low end of its £350-£450 estimate. But in the same sale, a St Bartholomew spoon of 1636 with the mark of Robert Tyle of Salisbury made £1,955, four times the £400-£600 estimate.

The reason why an unscripted spoon of 1550, estimated £600-£800, fetched a whopping £1,185, was probably because the buyer had had more time to discover a name for the unscripted WC and star mark than the auctioneers.

For a variety of reasons, well-heeled new buyers are entering the apostle spoon market. They are middle aged and retired lawyers, bankers and accountants - not only British but Americans and Australians - with time to read the growing number of textbooks that have made spoon-buying less of a lottery.

A Henry VIII St Matthias spoon, estimated £5,000-£8,000 at David Lay's auction house in Penzance three years ago, would have fetched nowhere near the £18,700 that was paid for it if Timothy Kent, a retired barrister and leading spoon expert, had not identified and published its fringed S mark as belonging to William Simpson, apprenticed to the London maker Robert Preston in 1499.

Simpson was one of the finest and most prolific makers of the first half of the 16th century. Kent's book on the spoon makers of the West Country - where many apostle spoons come from - has had a



A seller's market: Prices for apostle spoons have risen by 50 per cent since forgeries which flooded the market in the 1980s have been eradicated

Photograph: Sotheby's

steadily growing impact on the market since its publication in 1992.

Although prices for apostle spoons will probably continue to rise for a year or two, it is safest to consider this as a seller's market. The high prices are not being paid by speculators hoping for a quick profit, or by interior designers (seven-inch spoons can hardly be said to liven up a room) but by discerning collectors

who want that spoon even if they have to pay through the nose.

If they pause to think of investment, they might consider, wisely, returning their rarest purchases to auction in 10 years' time. By then, today's new collectors will have had their fill of run-of-the-mill pieces and will be competing even more fiercely for top-of-the-market gems.

Such maturation of the market

is already evident. A 1490 spoon depicting St James the Greater, from the earliest recorded set of hallmarked apostle spoons, fetched £22,000 at Phillips in October 1990 and £32,200 at Christie's in July 1993 - a gain of £10,200 in less than three years. If you really want to invest, you must dig deep to buy the very best.

The rarities keep cashed in at Sotheby's on 5 March are the 12 apostle spoons of the Swaythling Collection, reputedly presented by Charles II to Martha Clayton, wife of Sir Robert Clayton, Lord Mayor of London. Six date from 1524 and six from 1553. Complete 16th century sets are exceptionally rare. The Swaythling group is probably the finest of only two such sets still in private hands.

There are reasons other than improved documentation to feel confidence in apostle spoons. They are cheaper, and available in larger, more collectable numbers, than any other 16th or early 17th century objects. And they have lasting charm as cherished possessions from the days when cutlery was scarce (ordinary people carried their own spoons) and when families knew the

Barclaycard grants a new lifeline to students

The National Union of Students (NUS) has just clinched a deal giving its official seal of approval to Student Barclaycards, the junior version of the UK's first - and still its leading - credit card, in return for a donation of £1 a head to the union's funds. The deal is worth a cool £220,000 a year to the national union and to local student unions.

NUS national president Douglas Trainer insists that Student Barclaycards are consumer friendly because holders are limited to £350 worth of credit and there is no real risk of financial novices being lured into a lifetime of debt. No annual fees are charged for the cards and students who now take out a card will qualify for free gifts or cash bonuses.

For many students, the Student Barclaycard is a lifeline. Only 32 per cent of the 1.7 million full-time students in the UK have a credit or debit card, but this is almost entirely due to the fact that a student living on a grant alone is unlikely to qualify for a conventional credit card

from one of the existing credit card companies.

The qualifications for a Student Barclaycard with its lower monthly spending limit are much easier to meet, and 45 per cent of the 550,000 full-time students who use plastic to ease their poverty-stricken existence have Student Barclaycards.

This fine for students who stay in credit, because they can enjoy interest-free credit if they pay off their bills every month before the payment date.

But, let's face it, how many students can afford to pay their credit-card debts off in full each month when they only get their grants three times a year? On unpaid balances each month, new Student Barclaycardholders taking advantage of the absence of an annual fee will pay 1.515 per cent a month, equal to 19.7 per cent a year, and existing customers pay 21.7 per cent over a full year - and well ahead of the cheaper card companies like MBNA or RBS Advanta.

Clifford German

LOOSE CHANGE

Premier Select is offering readers a free calculation of their future pension benefits. It is available to readers with or considering a personal pension and includes all current and previous pensions, state, company or personal. Call 0990 834834. Standard Life Bank has

raised the interest paid on its deposit accounts to 6.96 per cent on balances up to £2,500 and 7.26 per cent on larger balances.

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BRIAN TORA

Some assurance for US bulls

It is that time of the month when the Government starts throwing statistics at us so we can gauge the state of the economy. There are those who consider we take our own temperature too often, but regular statistics do at least demonstrate a trend. And there are two worrying trends here in the UK at present: rising wage settlements and consumer spending.

In a way, we should not be too surprised over the trend in wage settlements. Even if the Government has not loosened the reigns since it took power, there is the perception that things have changed and years of difficult wage negotiating, in which employers have been backed by a parsimonious administration, have come to an end.

Prudential of America has already announced the intention to start the ball rolling. If listed in New York, Prudential is likely to be the tenth-largest company, with a market capitalisation extending into hundreds of billions of dollars, to as wide a range of recipients as benefited in the UK.

Moreover, the economy is buoyant. With senior managers and company directors benefiting, why should workers not have a slice of this particular cake too? But it has worried enough of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee to ensure a split vote over holding down interest rates.

The funny thing is that in the US, where unemployment is even lower than here, wage settlements remain subdued. Perhaps the workers there are all too aware of the threat of the wounded Asian tigers could present. And interest rates continue to fall in America. Another threat could be over the horizon, though. Or is it an opportunity?

The relative buoyancy of retail sales here is a recent phenomenon. Up until less than a year ago people were still reluctant to spend, despite a strong economy. Then

came the windfalls, delivering an estimated £20bn to Middle England, as building societies and life companies demutualised.

In America, of course, everything is always bigger. So it is with personal finance. It seems the American life assurance industry is poised to restructure in a move that will deliver billions of dollars of shares to as wide a range of recipients as benefitted in the UK.

Prudential of America has already announced the intention to start the ball rolling. If listed in New York, Prudential is likely to be the tenth-largest company, with a market capitalisation extending into hundreds of billions of dollars, to as wide a range of recipients as benefitted in the UK.

And this could be only the beginning. Metropoli Life, the second-biggest life assurer – with assets above \$170bn, is likely to follow suit. Prospects look exciting.

All this will take a couple of years but it heralds a restructuring of the US life assurance industry every bit as dramatic as what happened here.

The wealth that it will thrust into the hands of Americans does not bear thinking about. It could trigger a spending boom. But then again, it should support the stock market. Given the way personal savings have boomed over the past decade in the US, this could add to the wealth locked away for the future. Maybe those long-term bulls of American shares have got it right.

Brian Tora is chairman of Greig Middleton Investment Strategy Committee.

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How to read between the lines of annual reports

Investors often regard all company mail save their dividend cheques as junk. But studying a firm's annual report and accounts can pay off. John Andrew explains what to look out for.

One joke doing the rounds of the accountancy profession in the early 1970s was that a company had explored cutting postage costs by sending the shareholders' dividend cheques out with the annual report and accounts. Their research revealed that most shareholders threw the report and accounts away unread and the cheques would be thrown

away with them, and the project was abandoned.

Since then companies have made great efforts to improve the quality and readability of their messages to shareholders, and with good reason. "Reports and accounts are vital in assessing the performance and financial position of a company in which you might have current or future interest," says Gill Nott, chief executive of ProShare.

Companies are obliged by law to report regularly to shareholders. It is a means by which those with a financial interest in the enterprise can judge how well or badly the business is doing. The main report and accounts are published annually following the end of the company's financial year.

They are considered an important communication as it is the main way that a company has of explaining its business to the outside world, so it is not surprising that most companies

nowadays take considerable time and effort in producing the document.

Generally, they are glossy publications which contain photographs and colourful diagrams detailing the business's progress. Naturally they also contain reams of figures. However, they typically begin with narrative statements which provide a commentary on the business and financial performance of the company.

The opening section is usually the chairman's statement, which gives an overall view of what has happened over the past year, as well as some comments on the future prospects of the company.

The next narrative statement is normally the chief executive's report. This provides a detailed commentary of the performance of each part of the enterprise as well as information affecting the company as a whole. In some reports this section is called the "operating and financial review".

Normally, the directors' report follows. This contains data which has to be disclosed by law. It includes details of any charitable or political donations the company may have made as well as giving the names of the directors and their personal shareholdings.

Of course, the most important element of the report and accounts is the financial information. If you find pages of figures daunting, follow Gill Nott's advice: "At least take time to read the chairman's and chief executive's statements which will give you a feel for future prospects, is it optimistic, or is there a note of caution there?"

Although the financial information may look complicated, it is relatively easy to become familiar with the columns of figures. Ease yourself in by taking a look at the financial summary. This gives the financial highlights for at least the past two and sometimes up to five years. It is there-

fore possible – at a glance – to see the trend for profits as well as earnings, dividends and net asset value per share.

The two key financial statements are the balance sheet and the profit and loss account. The balance sheet is a snapshot of the company's situation at the end of its trading year. It shows what the organisation owns – its assets – and what it owes – its liabilities.

Most companies traded on the stock market control a number of subsidiary companies. They therefore prepare a consolidated balance sheet showing the assets and liabilities of all the businesses combined, as well as a balance sheet for the parent company.

The profit and loss account shows how much profit the company has made. It shows the turnover, which is the total sum of goods or services sold during the trading year, and the company's expenses.

If income exceeds costs the company has made an operating profit, but interest earned and paid then has to be taken into account to arrive at profit (or loss) before tax. The company's tax dues, the dividends paid to shareholders and the profits retained by the business will also be shown.

Other information to look at is the cash flow statement. This shows how much cash the company has generated from the business and other sources, such as selling a large asset. It also shows how much cash has been spent over the year.

Here are some points to look out for:

Cash flow: It is vital that there is a strong cash flow as it demonstrates that the earnings are real and it helps fund the company's expansion.

Turnover: This is another key indicator. If turnover is up profits and earnings per share should be too.

Pre-tax profits: If a business is

doing well profits and turnover should show a rising trend.

Dividends: Many investors prefer companies which pay a steadily rising dividend. Comparing earnings per share to dividends per share over a period will reveal the company's dividend policy.

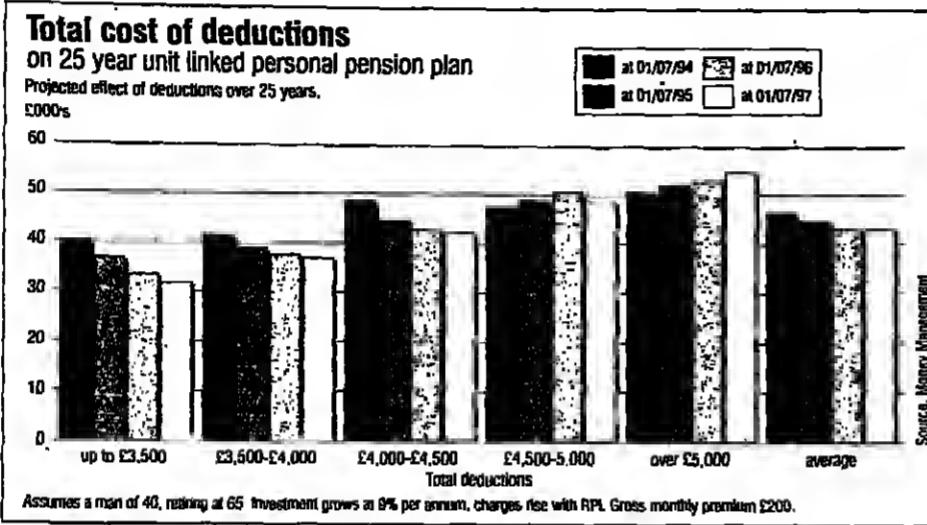
It is essential to read the notes to the accounts as these often have important information tucked away. Although report and accounts are important, you must always remember that their contents are historical. You must keep up to date through newspapers and magazines with companies' news.

'Introduction to Annual Reports & Accounts' is a simple guide with a step-by-step approach to interpreting the information. It is published by ProShare at £4.95 including p&p. Orders to ProShare (UK) Ltd, Library Chambers, 13-14 Basinghall Street, London EC2V 5BQ.

Check the cost of your investments



THE JONATHAN DAVIS COLUMN



Two things can be said with certainty about the current state of the retail financial services business. One is that consumers are sensibly beginning to take a much greater interest in planning their own financial welfare. The pensions selling scandal has brought home that nobody has an excuse any more for not taking greater care of their own finances. The State is no longer offering to do the job, and the industry – left to its own devices – has failed dismally to demonstrate that it is in the business of putting consumer interests first at all times.

The second thing that can be said is that there are also clear and positive signs of improvement. As consumers become more aware, and as past barriers to effective competition have started to come down, there is no mistaking the pressure for reform which greater competition is creating in the design and selling of retail financial products.

Both the insurance and banking sectors have undergone sweeping changes in the last few years, many for the better, and specialist providers such as unit trust and investment trust companies are also slowly starting to adapt to a more competitive environment.

Disclosure is proving to be a key element in the process of empowering consumers. Without clear and transparent information about the nature and cost of different financial prod-

ucts, whether they are pensions, mortgages or unit trusts, the transition towards a genuinely service-oriented business will continue to drag.

That is why the last government was right to insist on greater disclosure of information about product costs. It is now three years since the introduction of new statutory rules forcing insurance companies to disclose the full costs of different life insurance and pensions plans. Nine months ago the same rules were applied to unit trusts, investment trusts and personal equity plans (PEPs). The Personal Investment Authority's latest annual reports see the effect of the disclosure rules throw some interesting light on the pace of change that has taken place.

Anyone who can be bothered to go to the library and ask for the reports will be able to see how his own policies or savings schemes compare in cost with those of all the other main providers. Of course, cost is not the only issue in picking a savings provider: some of the companies with the best performance track records naturally try to extract a price for their superior investment performance. But what the figures do allow you to do is to see exactly how much additional return you need to obtain from a higher cost savings scheme or pension to compensate for the extra amount you are paying.

A fund management com-

pany with a particularly good track record as an active investor may do better than an index-tracking fund, to take one obvious example, but if it costs, say, the equivalent of 1.5 per cent a year more each year (as some do), then the final sum you end up with may well be cancelled out in the higher costs.

The overall story from the life and pensions business is one of steady, modest progress. As the graphic shows, the overall proportions of a typical 10 or 25-year pension or endowment policy that are eaten up by commission, charges and other costs has fallen over three years, although the rate of improvement slowed in 1997.

The range of costs between the best and worst provider is still quite large: for a 20 year unit-linked pension, for example, it ranges from 0.8 per cent a year in lost return (Equitable Life, the cheapest) to three times that amount for the most expensive.

It is probably no accident that one area where disclosure is not yet required – which is in showing the effect that stopping premiums on a life insurance savings scheme has on maturity and transfer values – is also one where the impact of costs and charges has, on average, remained much higher. The PIA sensibly intends to extend its rules to this area from now on.

Just as interesting are the comparisons between insurance

company products and unit and investment trusts. For regular savings schemes, the surprise is how similar in cost unit trusts and insurance company products seem to be, once you have allowed for the value of the life cover you tend to get with the latter. For lump sums, the average unit trust scheme is actually more expensive than the equivalent life product.

On all types of savings scheme, however, investment trusts are appreciably less expensive than either of the other two. That is no doubt the price investment trusts have to pay for being more volatile and less easy to understand than unit trusts. But, in periods of high discounts, as now, they remain the vehicle of choice for the more sophisticated investor.

Take note, however, that the range of costs in the unit trust and investment trust sectors is wider than it is in life insurance – there are some very expensive trusts out there, even though the average cost may be lower. If the experience with life products is any guide, the effect of disclosure should be to narrow the range.

You only have to look at experience in the United States – where mutual funds are materially cheaper on average than their equivalent here – to know that we have some way to go before we can declare that the consumer is yet king in this business. But at least we are moving in the right direction.

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6/PERSONAL FINANCE

Shops and banks are working against the clock to ensure tills don't reject credit cards because of the Millennium. Paul Slade reports.

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6/PERSONAL FINANCE

Are we facing terminal failure?



Credit squeeze: Cards with expiry dates past the year 2000 are being rejected at some shop tills

Barclays Bank, the first card issuer to start giving customers cards with a year 2000 expiry date, says the new cards are failing at the rate of one a day.

The problem arises when retailer systems fail to recognise the cards as valid. Like other computer systems, they were originally programmed to read only the final two digits of any given year, and crash when confronted with a reading of "00".

Visa and Mastercard's embargo on producing cards expiring in the year 2000 ended on 1 October last year. Barclays started producing 00 cards immediately, and now has over 1 million in use. The bank has so far had about 350 complaints from cardholders who have had their 00 cards rejected in shops and other outlets round the world, including 30 complaints in January.

Most other card issuers are also distributing 00 cards now, although none started as soon as Barclays. About four in 10 of the Barclays complaints arose in October. "Systems are becoming more compliant as time goes on," says the bank's Kirsty Robbie.

The big high street banks also supply their own credit card terminals to retailers, and have been busy updating those terminals to cope with the millennium bug for the past few years. Now, they say, all but a tiny handful of systems should be able to accept 00 cards with no problem.

But American Express is refusing to start producing its own 00 cards yet because it fears retail outlets worldwide will not be ready to accept them.

Atalia DaSilva of American Express says: "I'm sure we'll issue year 2000 cards this year, but I don't know when. We want to make sure the merchants are ready to accept them in their point of sale devices. When a merchant's system rejects a card, it doesn't say why. It just rejects it. We want to avoid that happening."

Abbey National will not start issuing 00 cards till June this year, when its own systems testing is complete and it can be "completely confident" cards will not be rejected at point of sale. This has meant cutting the lifetime of its own cards to just 18 months – an expensive move for the bank.

NatWest started producing 00 credit cards about a month ago, and has since issued some 400,000, with no complaints so far. The bank has also been responsible for modifying the 170,000 terminals it has in shops and other retail outlets.

Last month two cases came

to light where NatWest's modification of its terminals had failed. Both happened in Ikea branches, where customers' 00 cards were rejected, forcing staff to key in card details manually.

NatWest's Nick Gill says: "The upgrade had been put through for the year 2000, but there was a problem with the software. We realised that we'd need to write a new bit of software for it, because it was a bespoke terminal."

Mr Gill says the problem affected fewer than 100 of the terminals NatWest is responsible for, all of which have now been successfully dealt with. He says the bank is ahead of its rivals on year 2000 compliance.

Liz Phillips of the Credit Card Research Group says: "When you start issuing cards, you start finding the outlets where you're getting problems. It's often smaller retailers who've got a second-hand

terminal which may not have been made Millennium compliant. The good thing is that the system behind the terminals is working OK."

Gerard Long, manager of Midland's year 2000 programme says: "It's where the terminals are owned by the retailer that there's an issue. They should go to their systems supplier and ensure they get a compliant version. There's only a small number of those out there and they are being addressed."

Some believe there will be more problems for cardholders using their plastic overseas than for those in the UK. Erica Harper of Royal Bank of Scotland says: "I suppose the test will be when the holiday season arrives. Internationally, I think there's likely to be more problems. People have always been advised to take lots of ways of paying for things when they go away, but this year I think that will apply all the more."

Visa divides the world up into six regions, all of which it says are 99 per cent or 100 per cent 2000-compliant. Visa's Matthew Talbot says: "We don't see any particular problem even in the most far-flung places. In the smaller, more remote, places, where Visa might be accepted, often you'll find a manual swipe machine, and no electronics at all."

If you should find your own 00 card rejected in a shop or restaurant, the owner should be able to phone whichever bank supplied his terminal to get authorisation, take a manual imprint of the card and put the transaction through while you wait.

Don't bank on the Net, yet

ROBIN AMLÖT

INTERNET INVESTOR



By and large I have steered clear of getting into the technicalities of computers, modems, software and the paraphernalia which is involved in surfing the net for several reasons, not least because this is not a column about computers and I am by no means an expert on such matters.

Like most people I switch the kit on and expect it all to work as it should. Thus to be confronted by the following message was dispiriting: "Netscape's network connection was refused by the server. The server may not be accepting connections or may be busy. Try connecting again later."

This is software-speak for: "The number you have called does not know that you are waiting, nor does it care. Try again some time and have a nice day!"

So what? Well, I find it a matter of some concern to be confronted by such a message while investigating the options available for banking on the internet. It makes a mockery of the advantages one would rehearse for being able to bank via one's own computer in one's own time. It would be like turning up to the bank to pay money in or cash a cheque to see a notice on the door saying: "We're closed but we'll be open some time later. Come back then."

In fact, it happened to me last Sunday night, when one

wants for arranging it. Unusually, there are no extra charges for using income drawdown.

Winterthur Life is the biggest and most experienced provider of self-invested pensions on the market. This pension, one of the first fruits of the merger of Winterthur and Crédit Suisse, allows unusual access to the Swiss bank that favours the super-rich.

To use drawdown without losing money, high returns are required. This product allows investors at least a fighting chance of achieving them.

Drawbacks and risks: The product has a high minimum, so the chance to use a tailored

the web, beaten by two months by the Nationwide Building Society, which launched its online service in May 1997.

So far, these two remain the only web-based accounts on offer from large British financial institutions. However, the other banks are not far behind. Several offer PC banking via their own "intranet" operations, while TSB runs an online service through the service provider Compuserve which Lloyds is building on to establish internet banking.

By January 1998, after six months in operation, Royal Bank of Scotland's service "direct banking by PC" had 10,000 customers. The bank had originally planned for the service to be free for each customer's first six months, after which a charge of £1.50 per month was to be made. However, the charge has now been withdrawn and the service is fee-free.

Nationwide Building Society recently redesigned Online Banking site was always designed to be fee-free and allows you to run a FlexAccount and access CashBuilder card and InvestDirect account online. I will be returning to the subject of just how these accounts operate and what you can and cannot do banking online in the future.

Nationwide Building Society: www.nationwide.co.uk
Royal Bank of Scotland: www.rbs.co.uk

SPOTLIGHT ON: CREDIT SUISSE MANAGED PENSION

The product: The Crédit Suisse Managed Pension Portfolio.

The deal: Invest over £100,000 and Crédit Suisse will tailor, at the investor's behest, a personalised investment strategy for the pension fund. The product, a self-invested personal pension, is particularly aimed at those who want to put off buying an annuity while drawing some income from their fund, a facility known as "income drawdown". Plus points: Charges are clean, transparent and reasonable: just a 1 per cent annual charge, reducing to 0.45 per cent on larger amounts. The only other fee is whatever the financial adviser

investment strategy is only for those with big savings. Nick Bamford, an expert from InformChoice, the specialist pensions adviser, points out that it cannot be used to start up a pension fund from scratch.

If investors do use income drawdown, there is still a substantial risk of losing money. Crédit Suisse will have to keep up its good record of performance to make it worthwhile. If they don't, they can always be ditched.

Verdict: A valuable opportunity to tap the expertise of Crédit Suisse (but only for some of us). Marks out of five: Four.

16.2
UK

AT HOME: CLOCKS

Time flies when you have to be in three places at once

Here's a hands-on approach to time-keeping.

Rosalind Russell says, with designs in minute detail.

Some people need three clocks to tell the time simultaneously in London, New York and Sydney, either because they are so busy and important, or because they're too lazy to work out the time difference. But then time is money.

Especially to people like Sylvester Stallone, who has a gold-faced clock covering the entire ceiling of the breakfast room of his Miami waterfront home, described by a breathless admirer as "neo-classical". It's certainly different, but hard to

say if it's just what you need in the morning above your Marmite and toast.

Nottingham-based portrait artist Christopher Unwin has been making hand-painted clocks for three years, an artistic sideline that turned into a business. He has a range of designs which include a strip cat in front of a lighthouse, a seagull sitting on the sand, polar bears, and different sailing ships, but he'll accept commissions to paint anything you like, including a picture of your own home.

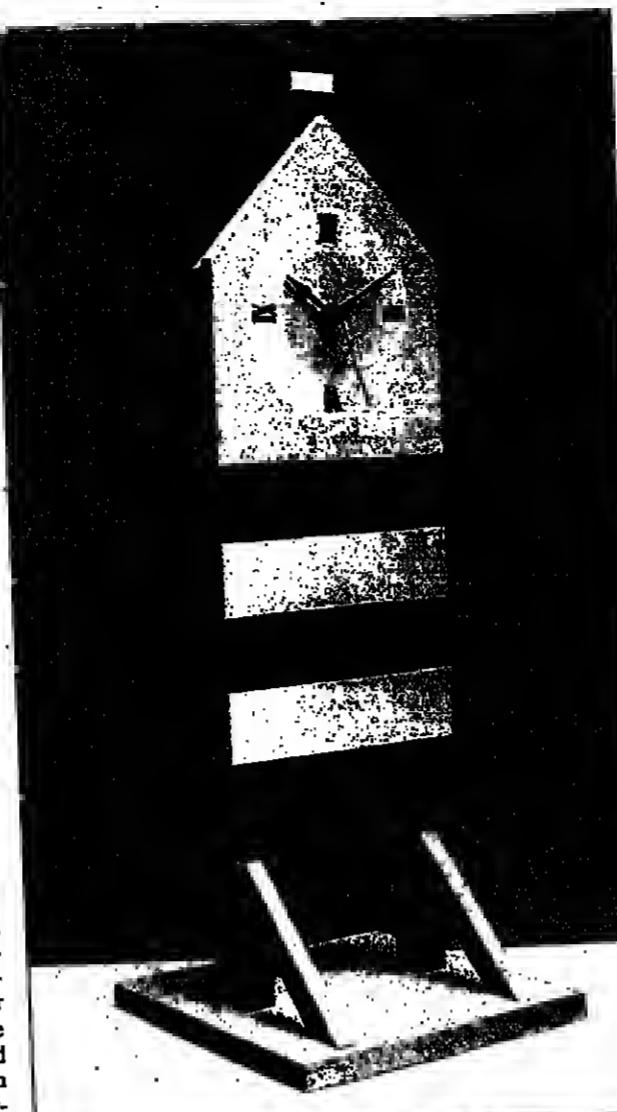
He has already painted a client's country cottage on one clock. The clock casings are painted in a combination of acrylic and emulsion paints on a wood panel base and have a cracked distressed finish. The maritime clocks - and free-standing beach-hut clocks - have proved popular with Americans, possibly because

the design reminds them of New England.

One American visiting Nottingham from his US nuclear base in Norfolk saw Christopher's work and commissioned him to paint a ship. Not Polaris, disappointingly, but a particular sailing ship which he supplied a picture of. The buyer was equally particular about the exact shade of background colour. "They do like to match up the clock with the curtains," comments the artist.

Another current commission has come from an actor appearing at the Nottingham Playhouse. His clock will feature figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte*; harlequin-type figures in ornate costume, which pre-date pantomime, and which require careful research.

Christopher Unwin's clocks start at £54, but commissions are negotiable, depending on the



All at sea: Christopher Unwin's hand-painted clocks include Beach Hut, above left, and Fish Trophy, above right

complexity of design. He displays his clocks on the website www.emmet.co.uk/paintedclocks.

Almost all the leading design shops now feature a range of clocks to match contemporary or quirky furnishings. The Art Room's spring mail order brochure includes the popular floppy clock, inspired by Salvador Dali's melting timepieces.

Made of resin, in bright blue, it's designed to sit on a shelf over four inches deep. It costs £79.95 plus postage.

BHS have introduced a smart floor-standing battery-operated clock with metal legs and face surround either in natural wood or painted blue, which wouldn't look out of place in a loft-style show home;

cabinet paintings, Roman numerals, a working mechanism and a traditional moon crown piece. It costs £39.95 from the mail order firm Bits & Pieces.

But for those who really do have to know the time in three cities at once, the Maritime Company offers the Bristol Shipping Company clocks, three clocks showing the time

in New York, London and Victoria on a hand-painted wooden background, for £69.50 plus postage.

Christopher Unwin, 0115 9856 389; Art Room, 01993 770444; BHS, 0990 24700; Debenhams, 0171 408 4444; Bits & Pieces, 01379 649 629; The Maritime Company, 01993 770450.

Why can't builders be more like dentists?

Ginetta Vedrickas wonders why it is so difficult to get work done on your home without having a nervous breakdown.

If only builders were more like dentists. Everyone swears that they have the most fantastic dentist but people only swear about their builders. Each time I hire someone I vow not to be fooled by that outwardly charming "renovator" who reads the same newspaper as me and is kind to children and animals. Then as I survey the half-finished "improvements", the mounting quotations and re-live the arguments with someone whose charms have long faded I realise it's ending in tears again.

Are you as gullible when getting a man in dungarees to do what you want?

Anita heard about Harry at a coffee morning: "When I found he advertised through my local NCT newsletter I thought he must be good." Anita wanted to restore her Victorian terrace, which was laid out as two flats, and needed a skilled person for the extensive work ahead. "When Harry came to give a quote he spotted a 'Coal not Dole' sticker and we got talking about politics. We seemed to share the same ideals. What really impressed me was the contract he produced giving timescales and payment dates."

Anita was also influenced by Harry's attitude to her child. "He made a big effort with Kieran, who adored him in return. Harry promised to ensure the house was



Photograph: Rui Xavier

Saintly plumber Stephen Greene, who comes recommended and prefers his customers recommended, too

safe and there wasn't too much dust around. I believed he'd be sensitive to our needs so I gave him the job."

Anita paid regularly, as the contract specified, but found Harry's deadlines slipped. "We even took out a loan to keep up our payments but as the months went by it became clear that he wasn't keeping to his schedule and more jobs were going wrong."

Harry's child-friendly approach disappeared along with his deadlines and Anita and toddler Kieran were left with half-built walls. "The final disaster was the kitchen which I'd decided to adapt, but I let Harry persuade me to have a new hand-built one." Although Anita paid as much as buying one from John Lewis, the resulting kitchen is fraught with problems. "The extractor fan is in the

wrong place, the sink and cooker don't even fit. It breaks my heart every time I look at it," says Anita.

And the charming Harry? "He became increasingly sarcastic and would sulk if I asked him to put things right. Work was supposed to finish in June but it was November before we could use our kitchen. It ended very badly."

Which? recently carried out a

survey of their members giving them details of over 5,000 tradespeople and 11 different trades. Unsurprisingly the most satisfied customers had used the tradesperson before and in contrast to Anita's experience the next most satisfied group employed someone recommended to them. Some traders did better than others but general builders and gas fitters came out worst. *Which?* has produced a fact-

sheet giving tips on how to choose a tradesperson and get jobs done properly. The survey found that trades associations can't guarantee the work standards of their members or offer protection if things go wrong.

Wendy thought her choice of builder was perfect. How could you go wrong employing a friend's husband? With limited funds and a Victorian terrace to renovate, Wendy outlined her priorities and the builder quoted a price - £15,000.

Work began but Wendy found that nothing was properly finished and the friend's husband kept demanding more money. "It got to the point where I considered I'd paid enough for the job I'd originally specified but which still weren't done. I even paid an extra £10,000, which he claimed wasn't enough," says Wendy.

The erstwhile friendly husband turned nasty. "We had a massive argument and he threatened me with violence. It was horrible. After that I dreaded bumping into him." Before Wendy could change her locks the builder took revenge by removing lots of things from the house including a set of double doors. Kitchen floor tiles and worktops were also missing. And the friend? "We haven't spoken since," says Wendy.

The Office of Fair Trading received 13,538 complaints about sub-standard home maintenance, repairs and improvements between January and March 1997, the most recently available figures. The OFT wants to see a register of approved traders who are committed to high standards and consumer redress rather than a reliance on codes of practice. A conference scheduled for later this year will discuss the use of a high-profile logo, and independent arbitration if things go wrong.

An insurance policy launched

this week by Home Buyers Legal Protection gives up to £25,000 of legal cover for £50 if you move and discover problems arising from developers, builders, surveyors and even solicitors. In addition to legal cover you have access to a 24-hour helpline for legal advice and emergency repairs.

Stephen Greene shines as an example of a true British tradesperson. He is a brilliant plumber, reliable, and hates tea. Steve never advertises and prefers his customers to come recommended as well. He warns against using plumbers "because they're cheap" and bemoans the fact that "even your 80-year-old granny can set herself up as a gas fitter." He believes regulation is having positive effects. "Get a recommendation by all means, but make sure they are recognised and will give you their Corgi number."

Steve's halo shines brighter in contrast to the cornucopia of craftsmen who have driven me to seek cognitive therapy. There was Thunderclap, who brought Miss Singh, his dog, to run underfloor cables while he rewired. She managed it but the lights dim when you switch on the kettle. Dave, the "skilled renovator" who did nothing himself but employed teams of boys who didn't understand that paint goes on the woodwork parts but not the glass bits. Lastly dear Punch, whose frequent Amsterdam visits were becoming ever costlier, forcing him to make a midnight call the night before laying the patio to double his quote (thanks for the pile of mouldy bricks you left.) Bitter, mot? Boys, this one's for you.

Which? fact-sheet LRBUIL: 0645-123580; OFT's Home Improvements leaflet: 0870-6060321; Home Buyers Legal Protection LTD: 01968-678989.

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On the waterfront: the old gasworks site in Greenwich will give rise to more than a thousand new homes with the emphasis on keeping a human scale Artist's impression from PA

Looking forward to the Millennium with a new way of living

The Millennium will bring not just that Dome, but also new housing that aims to be socially and environmentally aware. Andrew Mylius explains.

The contents of the Millennium Dome remain a mystery to all but Peter Mandelson and a few of his close advisers. But Londoners who like the idea of having the Dome for a neighbour could be moving into the new homes months before the Dome itself opens for business.

Millennium Village, a model housing project of 1,377 dwellings, will rise on the site of an old gasworks just south of the Millennium Dome. Anyone who wants to see what brown-field development, architectural sustainability, organic architecture, "intelligent" building, holistic design or social responsibility looks like, should

watch closely: construction starts in October and the first homes should be ready for occupation by the middle of next year.

The scheme has been master planned by veteran architect Ralph Erskine, best known in this country for the innovative and socially sensitive Byker housing estate in Newcastle and the Ark, an environmentally sophisticated office beside the M4 in Hammersmith, London. He is being supported by acting architects Hunt Thompson, the Moat and Ujima housing associations, and the construction/developer groups are Countryside Properties and Taylor Woodrow. Tom Barker, consultant on product development for the scheme who is managing director of cognac DCAh, says: "There's a satellite of experts buzzing around Erskine".

At first sight there is a striking resemblance to that most English of urban phenomena, the garden-city, born 100 years ago. The completed Millennium Village will contain 20 hectares of park, gardens and allotments. Housing is clustered into sub-communities; traffic will be minimal thanks to

carefully planned public transport; the scale is intimate.

Yet the new village should not suffer from Hampstead Garden Suburb's ghostliness; Erskine has designed it to create "critical density": enough people should live there to stimulate local businesses and support a whole range of shops, restaurants, cafés and studios. A quarter of the housing will be low-cost, assigned for local people, integrated with and indistinguishable from private housing – no snobbery here! And Millennium Village will have a school, health centre and community telceservices centre. Alan Cherry, chairman of Countryside Properties, says the scheme is about transplanting a piece of central London east of the city, "creating a new urbanism with a soft heart".

Buildings have a maximum height of 12 storeys to ensure their inhabitants stay in contact with the ground, even where the scheme is most dense. Green space offers opportunities for recreation and, according to engineer Chris McCarthy of Battie McCarthy, advising on environmental issues, the scheme promises to underpin

the advantages afforded by the mix of urban qualities with "humanising" factors by offering high levels of security. Public areas will be monitored by CCTV, and the tight grouping of houses will encourage neighbourhood-watch schemes. Forget about embattled tower-blocks or lonely suburbs; this is intended to be experimental housing where you know the person next door.

Next to social amenity, environmental issues are important, including the rehabilitation of a heavily contaminated site, ground-breaking standards of energy efficiency and longevity. Peter Sharratt, architect with DCAB, says: "Our aim is to design our problems before they get built. At worst, architects and designers use environmental consultants or engineers to solve problems with expensive technology that should not have been there in the first place."

Rainwater is prevented from leaching into the sub-soil through the use of non-porous piles. Materials are being chosen according to their embodied energy values – that consumed in producing them – and used values. They must also be recycled or renewable (the performance of wood is hard to beat at one level; at another, a composite material developed by the Atomic Energy Agency shows promise for flooring and roofing).

The buildings themselves will be modular, allowing for buildings of different sizes and shapes to be produced, and for changes of use – as families grow, or as people set up home businesses, for instance. Tom Barker says: "You don't build the house on site using bricks; you build the pieces in a factory like a car or computer". Architects will take about three weeks once the site has been prepared, and will enable local people to be involved in construction (and later, modification), without needing specialist skills.

Perhaps most impressive of all are the energy savings that the architecture will offer. About 50 per cent of all energy consumed in the UK and Europe goes into heating, cooling and lighting buildings. Through improvements in insulation, use of alternative energy, and use of materials in construction, Millennium Village aims to cut

energy consumption by half across the life of a building; the new houses will offer a 30 per cent reduction in water consumption. To help residents control their living environments, each house will be linked to a local area IT network. If you're gone on holiday and forgotten to turn the boiler off, just make a telephone call.

The area network will, in the longer term, enable anyone to plug into the Net or turn the spare bedroom into an office. In the short term, residents will be able to gather local information on bus times, events, shop openings or the weather, simply using a television set.

Millennium Village will go to planning in six weeks. In that time a lot of details will become clearer. But it is already evident that this is a forward-looking project that has the potential to change the way we think about the places we live. As Bernard Hunt of Hunt Thompson says: "We're leaving behind the pessimistic idea that the best is in the past – that we're at the end of history. We are seeking to do better than ever before, and we're living in an age when it's achievable."



PENNY JACKSON

How to take off as a chartered surveyor

If chartered surveyors feel they need a more glamorous image, then Richard Allen is a Public Relations dream with a licence to fly. For the past four years the chartered surveyor and fellow of the RICS has been building his own plane. Now D-Day has arrived and it is about to start its trials. If all goes well, he will be zipping over the Channel for a quick survey of a French property in his single-engine plane with RICS emblazoned on the side, and back in time for tea.

"I started on it during the property recession and it has taken about 4,000 construction hours. As surveying work started to come back I got used to dealing with clients on the phone while up to the amphi in epoxy resin," He enthuses about the low-wing tail-dropper with its full-colour moving maps and cockpit panel of his own design. "The beauty of it is I can keep it in a garage, fill it up and take off anywhere. A local farmer near Epsom is going to let me use his field. I will have a range of about 600 nautical miles – almost the south of France. It is about time surveyors ventured across the Channel. We've been far too insular."

"Once he's cleared French customs there is no field too far. "Only trouble is the plane is a little tricky to land, but I'm going to be trained by a Red Arrows pilot."

Allen made the plane with the help of his son and friends and support from over the garden fence. "It's tall poked out the end of the workshop, so it caused some comment." But not as

much as it's about to do, if the flying property does get off the ground.

It has been proving a Herculean task for estate agents to persuade people to put their homes on the market at the same time as they start house-hunting. One manager of a Black Horse agency even drew up an informal list of potential sellers recently so that everyone could see what there would be for sale if only they were all brave enough to take the plunge. But it seems from their latest Home Report as though sellers are gradually becoming more confident of finding something to buy and are increasingly prepared to sell their own places marketed immediately. This is also the finding of the National Association of Estate Agents; whose president, Andrew Jeffery, sees the Catch 22 situation resolving itself as more property comes on to the market.

According to Black Horse Agencies, the time it is taking for sales to be completed has sped up to an average of 11 weeks, the fastest they have seen since the reports began in 1995. One home in 10 sells in a week or less and nearly half in six weeks or less. On average, homes are achieving 95 per cent of the asking price, a figure which has levelled out over the past year. The hot spots led by Alton in Hampshire – it has been at the top for the past three surveys – with an average selling time of two weeks, followed by Gorleston, Great Yarmouth and Jesmond, Newcastle – newcomers to the hot list – with three weeks.

Save the legwork when buying your property – dial a solicitor

You can pay over £500 for a shabby conveyancing service. Or you can pay under £250 for a direct-dial solicitor, and receive a first-rate telephone service. Robert Liebman listens in.

Some first-time buyers are braver than others. When Liz Sowden was negotiating to buy her flat in St Margaret's, on the Thames opposite Richmond, she entrusted the conveyance to a solicitor whom she dealt with exclusively by phone and post. "My friend had used Cunningham's and recommended them so I rang for their brochure," says Ms Sowden, who is personal assistant to the managing director of shirtmakers Thomas Pink.

Ms Sowden was confident that the entire procedure could be handled by a combination of phone and fax, and that is indeed how it turned out, even including minor hitches. Of Cunningham's seven offices, three are in Essex, and none are remotely near central London, where she works, or west London, where she was then living in rented accommodation. Visiting their offices

would have been extremely inconvenient.

"There were problems along the way, but they were sorted out. There were some grey areas in the lease, and my solicitor asked them for clarification. He was diligent in getting his letters satisfactorily answered. Another question involved maintenance and service charges. My solicitor chased them hard to make sure they were fully paid up."

"Some of my friends bought flats and got bills for things that surprised them. My solicitor brought up these issues himself and sent copies to me of his correspondence. He organised a reserve fund from the previous owner so I did not get stuck for the proportion of the service charge that the seller was responsible for." Her total legal bill was £195 plus an additional £29 for phone, fax, postage, photocopying and petty expenses. VAT had to be paid, and she was also responsible for stamp duty and the other disbursements applicable to all property transfers.

For others who might be similarly tempted, she has only one tentative warning. "In my case, there were no negatives. But if there is a drawback to this method, it's that the procedure is only as good as your solicitor. If I had been unhappy, driving all the way to Essex to discuss it would not have been pleasant."

Not all of Cunningham's conveyancing clients come away with rock-bottom legal costs. "We always give the client an estimate in writing and we like to see the documents first," says

Cunningham's solicitor Stephen Kew. "If someone is subleasing part of a building, for example, a basement flat, the sublease can have two superior leases, and there could be 300 pages of documentation." Cunningham's charges £70 per hour for additional legal work.

Copying letters to their clients is one way that Cunningham's conspires to keep costs down. "Informing clients is cost-effective for us. They don't

'If there is a drawback to this method, it's that the procedure is only as good as your solicitor'

ring up. They know what is going on. They also see from the preliminary correspondence the kind of questions we are asking." Aware of outstanding questions, clients can then speak to the sellers themselves, which helps smooth out and speed the procedure.

Mr Kew says that his firm advises its clients to get a full structural survey, even for brand new properties. "One of our clients did this with a house under construction and they discovered subsidence. They backed away from the purchase. The client lost only the local search fee and partial legal fees."

Like all solicitors, direct-dial solicitors are members of the Law Society and, as such, are insured for claims against them. They can also carry out other legal work often connected to buying property, such as making a will. Electronic mail capability is coming soon to Cunningham's, "but we prefer fax. For legal documents, it's nice to get a signature," says Mr Kew.

The Law Society pamphlet "Working with your solicitor," while not specifically limited to conveyancing, contains much helpful information. The legal and linguistic intricacies of contracts and leases can not be easily summarised, but some books, such as the *Which? Guide to Buying a Flat*, admirably explain the basic terminology and principles.

As distance is no object to direct-dial conveyancing, several of them advertise in *Yellow Pages* throughout the country. The directory will be local to the reader if not to the solicitors themselves.

Cunningham's head office, Braintree, Essex, 01376 326868; Croydon, Surrey, 0181 688 8446; Solihull, West Midlands 0121 705 6868; Royal Institution for Chartered Surveyors, 12 Great George Street, Parliament Square, London SW1P 3AD, 0171 222 7000; Law Society, 113 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1SX, 0171 242 1222; LEAS – Leasehold Enfranchisement Advisory Service, 8 Maddox Street, London W1R 9PN, 0171 493 3116.

Living in a house on a private road has a certain snob appeal for some people, but it is not always an unmitigated blessing. In fact there are two types of private road. A private street is a privately maintained road to which the public has a right of way. If it falls into disrepair, the local authority has the right under the Highways Act to make it safe and charge residents for the work. And then there's a private road with no public right of way, that must be gated to through traffic once a year to keep its private status.

Private roads are "perceived to have a better cachet," says Nick Thomas, associate director of Hamptons International in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. The nearby Loudwater Private Estate has a number of entries and exits, all gated except the main one. Only the residents have keys. "Private estates tend to be in good areas and you can attribute a premium to a house in a private road setting," says Mr Thomas.

Malcolm Daniel agrees. He lives on the Firs Estate, four private roads of late Twenties properties designated as a conservation area in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire. "It's definitely contributed to the value of our properties," says Mr Daniel. The recent addition of white gate posts with "private" signs on the three entrances to the estate and road humps, paid for by the residents, have also made their mark.

Four years ago when the roads on the estate had really begun to deteriorate, Mr Daniel took over as vice chairman and treasurer of the Firs Estate. Sensing there was money to be made, the neighbour claimed that part of the road and the hedge running alongside it was his property. To avoid a lengthy and costly court battle, for which Almond Construction believed there were no grounds, they suggested the planting of six semi-mature trees as a screen between the development of three detached houses and the disgruntled

neighbour. Eventually, he dropped his claim to the land.

At least the owners of the new properties won't have any problems over boundaries now," adds Mr Montaut. "And their responsibilities for the private road have been clearly set out within the deeds of their property and were accepted by each of their solicitors." When the site is completed, Almond Construction will hand over the road to its residents.

Russell Copp now knows how important it is to look closely at the deeds when buying a house on a private road. When he bought one of 11 former farmworkers' cottages in Thurrock, Essex, he was pleased with the novelty of living on a private road, even though it was more like a "dirt track." "I thought we'd eventually get together with some of the neighbours and put down chippings to upgrade it," he says.

However, the road was still owned by the builder who had converted the cottages and he had other ideas. Last year, he asked each of the residents for £200 to surface the road. "We had no say in who he chose to do the work," remonstrates Mr Copp. "They were a bunch of cowboys and a year on, the surface is breaking up." The contractor also covered up the mains stop-cock outside Mr Copp's cottage with tarmac.

Unsurprisingly, he refused to pay his share. "I'd advise anyone considering buying in a private road to find out exactly what responsibilities you have and to work together with your neighbours. If you're not sure, always get legal advice."

Having your own road may appeal, but it may also be a big headache, says Fiona Brandhorst. **'Private, keep out' may be good advice**

Residents Association. The crunch came when its funds were too low to pay the annual insurance premium providing cover for up to £500,000 if someone claims for an injury caused by the condition of the road (cover is provided by the local authority on public roads). Now, almost all of the residents from the 85 houses pay an annual subscription of £60 a year and a five-year repair plan is in place. It is assumed that each resident owns half of the road in front of their property. "We can't force people to pay," says Mr Daniel, "but as the profile of residents has become much younger they are able to afford it and actually expect to pay something towards the upkeep."

Last year, the committee appointed a contractor to resurface two of the roads. "It was all very new to us," says Mr Daniel, whose day job is as a film editor with the BBC. "We asked a road surveyor, recommended by the local council, to draw us a map of the areas he considered would need immediate attention. If anyone complained that a pothole outside their house isn't being attended to, at least we can show them the surveyor's report."

Would it not be easier to ask the local authority to take over the estate, since it is a through route? "We looked into it," says Mr Daniel, "but they declined. They wanted to make proper footpaths and kerb edging and we don't want all that."

The Land Registry office in London underlines the importance of asking a solicitor to look very carefully at a property's title deeds to ensure that po-

tential purchasers are happy with rights of access and maintenance obligations. Some private roads may have covenants that restrict redevelopment.

The Firs Estate association is there to maintain the roads, Mr Daniel stresses, to sort out neighbourly problems. But for Andre Montaut, director of Almond Construction, sorting out a long-running dispute with a neighbour was vital when he was negotiating to buy a piece of land for redevelopment.

'Private roads have a better cachet. You can attribute a premium to a house there'

The only access was via its own private unsurfaced road. "The chap living next door to the proposed site had a dispute with the owner over boundaries," says Mr Montaut. "We had no say in who he chose to do the work," remonstrates Mr Copp. "They were a bunch of cowboys and a year on, the surface is breaking up." The contractor also covered up the mains stop-cock outside Mr Copp's cottage with tarmac.

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